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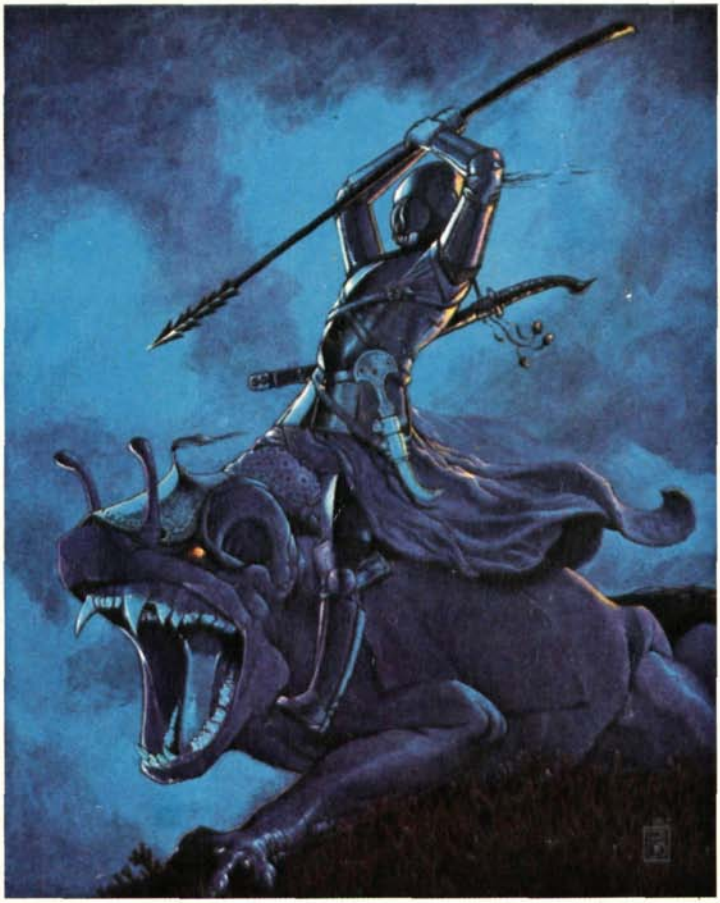
fantastic SCIENCE FICTION

ALL NEW STORIES



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David R. Bunch's latest mindbender, "New Member" • Fred Pohl Interview • "The Magician's Daughter" (conclusion of "The White Isle") • Book & Film Reviews

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IN THIS ISSUE

SHOULD A mere mortal dare hope for some ultimate answers beyond the span of a lifetime? Can anything reasonably good come out of humanity's often senseless and gargantuan struggles? Where does inspiration for the final stroke of paint on a masterpiece come from? In the future will we hook into machines to escape being real? Or to escape taking responsibility for our own experiences? How might an alien's emotions differ from our own? Could we ever legislate genetic control over people's emotions? How many futures can actually exist? Will people ever learn how to really communicate with one another?

The stories in this issue are about all of the above. They're also about being human and participating in the world of ideas with some talented people who chose to share theirs with us. If you are entertained in the process, we'll be duly gratified and turn directly to collecting the next group of ideas.

Darrel Schweitzer concludes his fantasy novel "The White Isle" on these pages, the second part dealing with the fortunes of "The Magician's Daughter." Longtime contributor David R. Bunch has returned to *Fantastic* with a new tale sure to make you cerebrate. And Wayne Wightman, whose stories have recently appeared in *Amazing*, treats us once more to his gentle brand of satire in "The Imprecise-Delights of Love". In addition, we are presenting five other short story writers, five columnists whom we thank for enriching our knowledge of the science fiction and fact scene, and a group of artists whose clever visions so aptly set our stage. Of special mention are Steve Fabian's masterful illustrations for his sword and sorcery feature "Daemon," and Gary Freeman's interpretation of events in "The Magician's Daughter".

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fantastic SCIENCE FICTION

July, 1980

FEATURES

THE WHITE ISLE 28
by Darrell Schweitzer
Completion of the fantasy novel forthcoming from Borgo Press. Part II: "The Magician's Daughter".

INTERVIEW 5
by Brian M. Fraser
"Prophet of Doom & Gloom", an interview with Fred Pohl

A FABIAN FEATURE 98
by Steve Fabian
Part 5 of Daemon, a sword & sorcery series created for Fantastic by Steve Fabian

FICTION

THE IMPRECISE DELIGHTS OF LOVE 69
by Wayne Wightman
Machinations vs. True Grit; A Love Story

ROPE THE HORNET 80
by Lawrence C. Connolly
Observation Overkill

A VISIT WITH LENNY 93
by K.L. Jones
Time Tripping, Talent & Too Many Teeth

THE COMPROMISE 102
by Marcia Martin & Eric Vinicoff
A cure for "abnormality"

NEW MEMBER 115
by David A. Bunch
Breaking them in at "The Sloom"

THE COMPETITOR 121
by Brad Linaweaver
A Little Voice Told Me So

PARABLE OF BARTER Back cover
by Jose Juan Arreola
Trade Goeth Before the Fall

DEPARTMENTS

INTERCOM 4
Reader comment

READERSCOPE 8
Book Reviews by Tom Staicar

GAMES FEN WILL PLAY 13
by Greg Costikyan

FILM FOCUS 17
by Steven Dimeo

THE SPECTROSCOPE 22
by Robert Wilcox
A look at humor in sf

ABOUT THE COVER

COVER ILLUSTRATION by Wayne Douglas Barlowe from "TOMORROW & BEYOND" Copyright 1978 by Ian Summers; reproduced with permission of Workman Publishing Company, N.Y. The May, 1980 AMAZING reviewed Barlowe's newest work, "BARLOWE'S GUIDE TO EXTRATERRESTRIALS".

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Reader Comment

To the Thoughful humans at *FANTASTIC SF,*

I must have been on a long space trip because I have just picked up, and read, my first copy of your exceptionally good publication.

On my chart you deserve some gold stars because:

1) Most of your stories are SOFT Science Fiction, rather than hard core; one doesn't have to be a physicist to enjoy them.

2) There is quantity as well as quality.

3) The Bio-sketches are great because they give the reader a little insight re the author, sometimes a bit startling.

4) "Why We Chose This Story" is enlightening because it gives the reader, and possible contributor, an insight re the editor.

All of this makes your book warmly human.

I would guess that countless thousands of readers would feel as I do. So ever increasing success to *FANTASTIC SF,* because you surely deserve it.

Sincerely,
Bill Zamboni
Vista, CA

And to a Most Thoughtful Human in Vista, CA., thank you.

Dear Mr. Gohagen:

I am a former subscriber who lost interest in *FANTASTIC* when you went to the reprint format. Since the format change I have glanced at both *FANTASTIC* and *AMAZING* on the stands but found little to interest me until now. I bought the April 1980 issue of *FANTASTIC* on the strength of the Darrel Schweitzer piece "The White Isle." I was very attracted by Gary Freeman's illustrations and your spotlighting of the piece on the rear cover and on the inside front cover. I especially enjoyed "Damned Funny"; even if it was a reprint, "Blood Money," "Fantastic Facts," and "Games Fen Will Play." I do not know if I will become a regular reader of *FANTASTIC* again but the April 1980 issue did capture my attention. I will certainly buy your next issue for the conclusion to "The White Isle." After that who knows?

Sincerely yours,
Howard H. Huggins
Covesville, VA.

Hang in there. The best is always yet to come.

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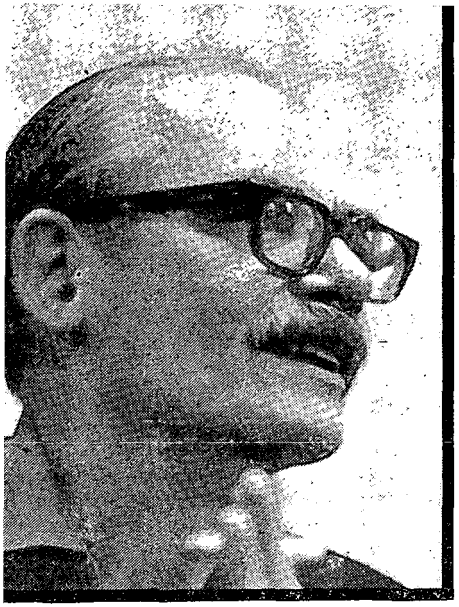

PHOTO © Brian M. Fraser

Interview

PROPHET OF DOOM & GLOOM

Science fiction author Frederik Pohl tells the future like he sees it.

by Brian M. Fraser

"If you look at some of the long-range consequences of things that are now being advocated as national policy in the United States, Canada and Western Europe," says science fiction author Frederik Pohl, "you find that they are, not invitations to disaster, but almost guarantees of large-scale disaster."

"SCIENCE FICTION is a sort of Distant Early Warning System, letting you know what's going to happen or what might exist some other place in the Universe," says award-winning SF author Frederik Pohl.

"The reality most urgent for all of us now," contends Pohl, "is change. And science fiction is the literature of change. Every other kind of literature seems to take for granted that the world is static and predetermined, that it's going to be this way indefinitely. Science fiction shows the ways in which it will be quite different."

And Pohl's most recent SF novel, *JEM*, foresees a bleak future for Man if the international power divisions between Have and Have-Not nations further intensify.

"We have what is called The Third World, which seems to break the planet into three power blocks," says Frederik Pohl, when interviewed.

"It seems to me quite clear that there are Have nations in terms of fuel, Have nations in terms of food, and Everybody Else. And Everybody Else are basically people exporters, the small countries like Yugoslavia and North Africa who supply workers for the industrialized countries of Europe, and the Latin American countries who supply workers to us. They export people to fill jobs."

Power Politics

In Pohl's fictional scenario of the world-of-the-future, the People Bloc includes Pakistan, China, Turkey, Poland and other countries, while the Fuel Bloc naturally is composed of such oil exporters as Saudi Arabia, Venezuela and, with the promise of North Sea reserves, the British. Canada, the United States, Russia, Brazil and Bulgaria are among those allied as part of the Food Bloc.

In *JEM*, the international power struggles even work their way down into the terminology of everyday life, to interpersonal insults using such degrading short-forms as the Peeps for the People Bloc, the Fats as a nickname for Food-exporting nationals or the Oilies or Greasies as euphemisms for Fuel-rich forces.

According to Pohl, these divisions between various world interests can only become more dynamic.

"There's no question that they have intensified," he says, "OPEC has unified itself pretty well, at the expense of unifying a lot of the rest of the world against it.

"The food-producing nations have not really done anything like that, but I think it rather likely something of this sort will happen as a counterbalance to OPEC —

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which will leave nothing for the rest of the world to do but to make itself into some sort of Bloc and function as best it can."

The science fiction writer has translated this real-world situation into a story, with invented characters and interpersonal relationships, a plot of power politics and international incidents, set on the Earth we know and on a fantastic world dreamed up in Pohl's imagination.

"*JEM* takes place in some unusual places, a lot of it on a planet that I made up. But it starts out in Sofia, Bulgaria and parts of it in Yugoslavia. They are places that I have visited and I thought that I would like to write about, they seemed interesting to me.

"The characters in *JEM*," he continues, "Started in my mind as four participants at a conference on exobiology, on the biology of other planets, which I pretended, invented for the purposes of the story."

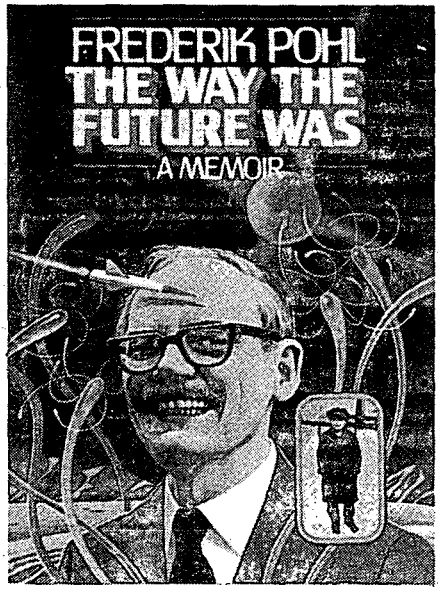
The four major human beings are exobiologist Danny Dalehouse and Margie Menninger, daughter of a behind-the-scenes political powermonger, from the United States; a split-brain translator from Bulgaria named Ana Dimitrova and Pakistani astronomer Ahmed Dulla who announces the discovery of the new planet. The personal feelings and preoccupation with sex of some of these individuals makes up part of the story.

"As I began writing about them, I began to see who they were," Pohl says, describing his writing process. "I'm not a very orderly person; I don't plan very far ahead; the characters in my books usually grow as I write about them.

"A story develops as I write it. If I write one page, it suggests to me what the next page is going to be.

"In the case of *JEM*, the novel developed over a fairly long period. Parts of it go back ten years; some of the individual sections which later worked into the novel. I usually take about a year's straight work, about a year's time, to write a novel. But, in terms of calendars, it's normally more like four or five, and sometimes ten or twenty years because I don't usually work straight through."

Fred Pohl is one of science fiction's top writers and a master at creating superb social structures in the future. Last year, his book *GATEWAY* won the three major science fiction awards: the fan-awarded



PHOTOGRAPH of Book Jacket by Brian M. Fraser

Hugo, the professional Science Fiction Writers of America Nebula Award and the World SF Organization's John W. Campbell Jr. Memorial Award as Best SF novel of the previous year.

In addition, his autobiography of 50 years in the science fiction field — as a teenaged fan, editor, writer-collaborator, agent, magazine and book editor, lecturer and author — *THE WAY THE FUTURE WAS: A Memoir*, has been published both in hardcover and recently in paperback by Del Rey Books, New York.

Stylistically, his newest book is unlike the award-winning *GATEWAY*.

"In *GATEWAY*," he explains, "I was trying to do some rather difficult tasks of compression of information and I used sidebars, the little added bits of information that appear every couple of pages throughout the book, to convey things which aren't really necessary to the understanding of the story but that I thought relevant and interesting.

"*JEM* is a much more conventionally-constructed novel. It was a little difficult for me to write though," he adds, "because it has a number of different viewpoints. There are, I think, actually about seven voices heard in it — three of them not human — and I found it a challenge to try to keep straight in my mind who was talking

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at what time and what *his* perceptions would be."

Bizarre Beings

Pohl designed three exotic types of extraterrestrials to live on his faraway planet: the Krinpit, crab-like land creatures; a race of mole-like many-limbed tunneling aliens and an intriguing species of hydrogen-filled balloon beings.

"The ones I liked best," admits the author himself, "were the gas-filled balloonists. And they came about because of a man named Harlan Ellison (another well-known science fiction writer) who had proposed a planet for a series of lectures he was conducting at UCLA in California.

"One of the things that he asked the participants who were attending was to make up creatures and settings for adventure stories which could take place and would be written by a bunch of science fiction writers. For him, I invented the balloonists and I liked them so much I didn't want to give them up. So, when I came to write *JEM*, they formed one of the races.

"It was interesting to try to think of what it would be like to be a creature that did not have the mobility we have, that didn't have the ability to handle tools, that didn't have opposable thumbs or hands that could build machines and that nevertheless had a fairly well-developed social structure and some interesting customs.

"Their custom of singing seemed to me to derive logically from their construction. Their basic mass being in compressed hydrogen, they'd have a lot of gas to vent. This would make a sound and it would probably play a very large part in their lives.

"The Krinpit, the hard-shelled creatures, I had actually started to write a story about some years ago and decided that there really was not enough to say about aliens who looked sort of like squashed crabs to sustain the story. It was a defeat; I wasn't able to do what I wanted to do.

"But I remembered them. I thought about them a great deal at the time; I invented social customs, holidays and relationships. And, when I had a chance to include them in *JEM*, I did.

"When I began writing about the Krinpit, my attempt was to describe aliens who were completely inhuman, did not look in any way anthropomorphic, but that nevertheless had the same sorts of social and personal relationships as human beings do. Not the same ones," Pohl emphasizes, "but the same sorts.

"And I made them up from the whole cloth. I thought of the most unlikely, funny-looking, absurd, ludicrous things that I could imagine which would still be describable and then tried to develop from that what sorts of individuals might fill those grotesque bodies.

"The others (the burrowers), I just made up because of the Rule of Three — if you have two of anything, you should have a third," admits the author.

Powerful Plot

Pohl's story is not too optimistic about Earth's future if the conflicts between the Food, Fuel and People Blocs continue.

Within his narrative, these alignments are in a desperate race to take advantage of Man's first contact with sentient alien races as discovered by a probe to a distant star. In astronomical terms, the semistellar object is N-OA Bes-bes Geminorum 8426. More informally, it's the planet Klong of the sun Kung. But it's simply nicknamed *JEM* by its new Terran inhabitants.

Each block competes to launch a manned expedition to the planet via tachyon transmission (a science fiction-invented transportation method to exceed the speed of light for the purpose of the story). Once on JEM, all three camps again are in competition, not only with themselves but also with the somewhat hostile environment, particularly the three native intelligent races.

Meanwhile, on Earth, the political and power situation is further deteriorating, from individual incident to reprisals and eventual escalation to the brink of global war.

The author's dramatic conclusion presents one possible alternative to consider.

Prophets of Doom

Pohl believes that one function of the science fiction writer is to give warnings about the future.

"It's a role that I enjoy. I like to talk about what I perceive to be coming out of science fiction as reality. But some of the disasters that I see really don't come from science fiction, they come from scientists more than science fiction stories.

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"There's a great deal of interest among the scientific community in questions like 'How much carbon dioxide there is in the atmosphere and what the consequences are if the level increases very much.' Some of them are pretty scary.

"Carbon dioxide has a tendency to cause what's called a 'heat sink' — the more carbon dioxide in the air, the hotter the atmosphere gets. There are certain inevitable consequences of that such that, if it gets beyond a certain point, it may not be stoppable.

"But where that point is, no one knows for sure. And we're continuing to burn up gasoline and coal as if there is no such point. It's even possible we've already passed it, although I think that unlikely. I think it's certain, however, that the point does exist and it's either in the next decade or two, or certainly within the next century."

As a result, and to provide a clear unequivocal warning to the public, Pohl is writing a non-fiction book, which has as one tentative title, *1001 THINGS YOU SHOULD WORRY ABOUT THAT YOU NEVER KNEW YOU HAD TO WORRY ABOUT UNTIL NOW.*

"That's probably not the title which will appear on it," he says, candidly. "The title that I have on it now is *PROGRAMMING TOMORROW*. But that doesn't seem to do justice to what I want to say.

"I intend it to be fairly polemical and, I hope, a little bit scary book," the author states. "It seems to me there are a great many things happening that have very probable consequences which are terrifying.

"Because of the nature of politics, in all of the developed countries of the world, there is very little planning that goes beyond maybe two years, or three at the most. It goes for the length of time that a person or party expects to stay in office and really nothing beyond that.

"But some of the consequences of what is happening now require much longer-range thinking than that, in terms of the decades at least and probably of centuries or more. If you look at some of the long-range consequences of things that are now being advocated as national policy in the United States, Canada and Western Europe, you find that they are, not invitations to disaster, but almost guarantees of large-scale disaster. And that's what I want to talk about in the book."

Whether presenting the dangerous potential of international power politics in the science fictional form of *JEM*, laying out all the world's future alternatives as non-fiction in his upcoming *PROGRAMMING TOMORROW*, or speaking at SF fan conventions, Frederik Pohl transmits a definite forewarning that the future will be very different than today.

BRIAN M. FRASER teaches a course on Science Fiction in the Media, given through the Institute of Social Communications, Saint Paul University in Ottawa, Canada. ■

READERSCOPE

BOOK REVIEWS

by Tom Staicar

The White Hart by Nancy Springer. *(Pocket Books, $2.25; also SF Book Club edition.)* Nancy Springer began her exploration of the peoples and lands of Isle in her book called *The Book of the Sun*. *The White Hart* is the second volume of her series which is to be followed by a third and final book. The new novel stands alone very effectively, showing no signs of padding or of dependence upon what went on in another book. The tightly written novel managed to hold my interest all the way through.

Using time-honored fantasy elements such as a named sword which "cozens the will to power" and a race of former gods who now choose to dwell in the lands of humans, Springer tells a story which is quite enjoyable.

Bevan, the former god who is now Prince of Eburacon, rescues Ellid, who is the daughter of Pryce Dacaerin. Ellid had been kidnapped as part of a plan to bring about a confrontation between forces which are vying for dominance over the peoples of Isle. A white hart (a deer) has a mystical link with the characters which is finally revealed near the end of this book.

Along with being a good writer with a

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smooth style, Nancy Springer has the wisdom to keep a novel brief when that is the optimal length, as in the case of *The White Hart*. Others might have bloated the book up to 400 pages of wordiness.

A Gazeteer of the Hyborian World of Conan and an Ethnogeographical Dictionary of Principal Peoples of the Era. Compiled by Lee N. Falconer. *(Starmont House, Box E, West Linn, OR 97068. $4.95.)*

The Annotated Guide To Robert E. Howard's Sword and Sorcery: Conan-Kull-Kane. by Robert Weinberg. *(Starmont House, $7.95.)*

The casual reader of Robert E. Howard's fiction will have little use for these, but lovers of his sword and sorcery will find them to be worthwhile supplements to their reading.

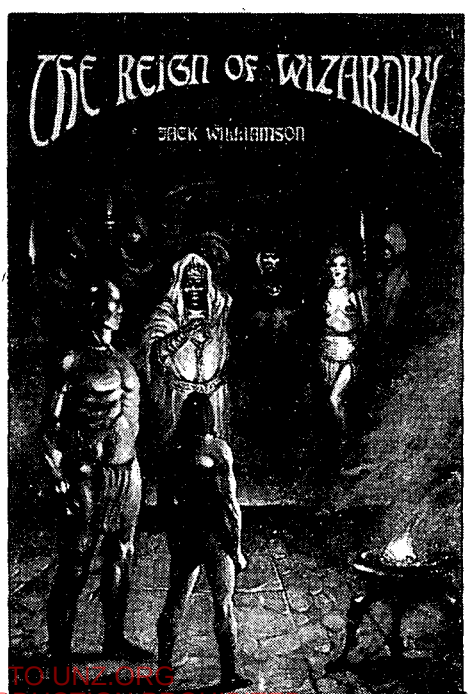
Falconer's gazeteer is an alphabetical guide to all the places mentioned in the Conan stories, to which is added a chronology and a section of maps. Starmont also publishes a full-color 40 by 28-inch wall map based on the same kind of careful study of the Conan fiction.

Weinberg's volume is a guide to all the sword and sorcery fiction of REH, providing plot synopses and character listings for all the tales about Conan, Kull, Bran Mak Morn and Solomon Kane. Each hero is set in perspective by a commentary and introduction by Weinberg and a chronology and listing in order of publication is provided for the Conan stories.

When I bought the Lancer paperbacks of the Conan and Kull stories around ten years ago, I wondered if the "Howard boom" would bottom out. After the recent court battle over reprint rights among major publishing houses and the several million additional sales since the Lancer edition, it appears that REH's popularity is here to stay.

The Reign of Wizardry by Jack Williamson. *(Phantasia Press, 13101 Lincoln, Huntington Woods, MI 48070. $15.00 hardcover.)*

I had the opportunity of talking with Jack Williamson a couple of years ago. He told me: "From the earliest stories I always tried to imagine that I was creating a motion picture with an unlimited budget for special effects." This helped make him



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a popular attraction in the SF pulps, beginning with "The Metal Man" in the December, 1928 issue of Amazing Stories.

When John W. Campbell, Jr. decided to start a new type of fantasy magazine called *Unknown*, he wrote to several top SF authors and explained what he needed. His letter to Williamson is reproduced in the newly-written introduction in this edition. *The Reign of Wizardry* was based on Campbell's suggestion that Minoan Crete was one place where magic might have worked.

The book is about a pirate who courageously takes on the evil powers of Minos in an attempt to break his rule of Crete. Fighting against sorcery, illusions and such creatures as the brass Talos, he must overcome three challenges before confronting his real enemy, The Dark One.

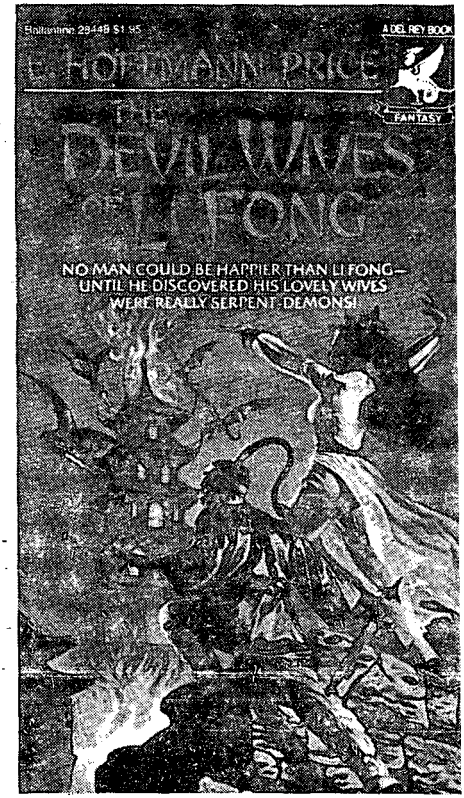
The book is worth reading today, although geared more for the 1940 audience. Its strong conflicts and many surprise plot twists make up for its melodramatic qualities. Phantasia's edition is printed on high-quality paper and has a deluxe binding.

The Devil Wives of Li Fong by E. Hoffman Price. *(Del Rey, $1.95.)*

Price is 82 years old and this is his latest novel — not a reprint. According to the publisher, Price is known in San Francisco's Chinatown as Tao Fa, "mentioned in prayers every new moon and full moon in two Taoist-Buddhist temples." "He declares that in addition to silk, gunpowder, and the magnetic compass, beautiful women were invented in China. Doubters are invited to meet him at dawn, on horse or afoot, with sword or pistol."

The Devil Wives of Li Fong is set in old China, where serpent spirits turned into beautiful and bewitching women and Li Fong is drawn into deadly battles with kung fu warriors. I was captivated by the wealth of sensual details: flames, bells, rustling silk, the scent of sandalwood and the slithering sound made by a seven-yard long serpent. Nearly every paragraph contained effects which brought an image vividly to my mind.

Like the old pulp stories in *Magic Carpet* and *Weird Tales*, the story is based on the atmosphere and the strange, uncanny



beings who surround poor Li Fong. This one is great fun to read and I highly recommend it.

A Dreamer's Tales by Lord Dunsany. *(Owlswick Press, Box 8243, Philadelphia, PA 19101. $12.75 hardcover. Illustrated by Tim Kirk.)*

Lord Dunsany (pronounced "dunn-SAY-knee") was a multi-talented man who lived between 1878 and 1957 and managed to squeeze several lifetimes into that period. Interested in hunting, fencing, lecturing, poetry, prose and drama, Dunsany was also a soldier and the chess and pistol-shooting champion of Ireland.

George Scithers' Owlswick Press has taken the utmost care in presenting Dunsany's *A Dreamer's Tales* with excellent illustrations, good quality paper and a fine

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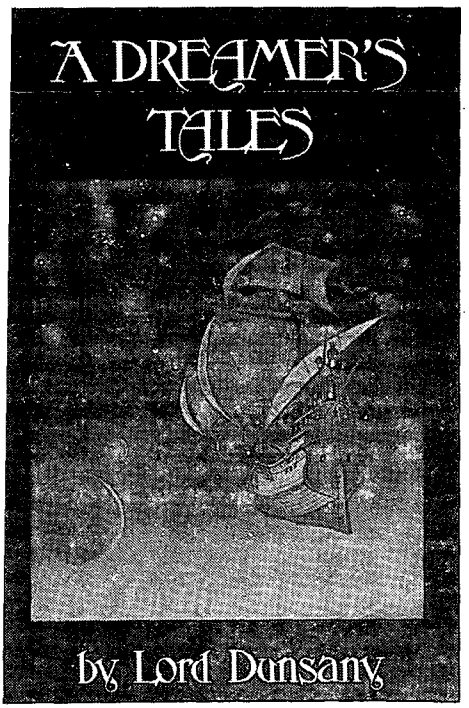
binding, as they did with the earlier *Tales of Three Hemispheres* ($9.00).

If you have not already acquainted yourself with Dunsany's rich language and eerie, exotic settings, you should consider *A Dreamer's Tales* as the place to do so. Good versus evil, the secrets of the universe, spirits that cannot find rest in death and the lands which lie beyond the known are all found in this collection of haunting stories.



Fantastic Worlds: Myths, Tales, and Stories. Edited and with Commentaries by Eric S. Rabkin. *(Oxford University Press, 200 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016. $15.95 hardcover, $6.95 paperback.)*

Dr. Rabkin is a Professor of English who teaches courses in SF and the fantastic. His readings in both fields are extensive and his thinking is clear and incisive, as shown in the introductions and commentaries in this anthology. "The real world is a messy place where dust accumulates and people die for no good reason and crime often pays and true love doesn't conquer much," he says, while fantasy "offers us worlds in which some order, whatever that may be, prevails."

To illustrate the range of the fantastic and to explore some of the reasons why we find our needs satisfied by reading fantasy stories, he has assembled a selection of fifty-one myths, fairy tales, sections from novels and modern fantasy short stories. Richard Brautigan, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. and the Nigerian author Amos Tutuola are represented, as are Ovid, the Brothers Grimm and the King James Bible version of Genesis.

Rabkin is not one of those academic outsiders who takes a few days to read a couple of Hugo winners and then writes a treatise on fantasy and "sci-fi." He was a college friend of Joe Haldeman and is one of the best-read people writing about the genres today. *Fantastic Worlds* can enrich one's understanding of the effects and elements which go unnoticed in fantasy reading in many cases.

The Beginning Place by Ursula K. Le Guin. *(Harper & Row, hardcover, $8.95.)*

Le Guin is a giant in literature, with book sales in the millions, a number of top awards and unparalleled critical acclaim. This makes it difficult to review her latest novel without bringing along the unwanted baggage of past novels, a body of reviews and a stack of promotional material and essays. A book should be judged independently of all this, but this is difficult to do.

The Beginning Place concerns two young people, Hugh and Irena, who have boring and routine daily jobs and who are each trapped in an unhappy home environment. Separately, they enter a peaceful land in the country through a mysterious gateway at the outside edge of town. This land, called Tembreabrezi by its population of beings who are not quite human, seems to be a wish-fulfillment place of refuge and escape. There is an undercurrent of fear, however, and the two outsiders are forced to deal with survival before too long.

I did have a problem in reading the book.

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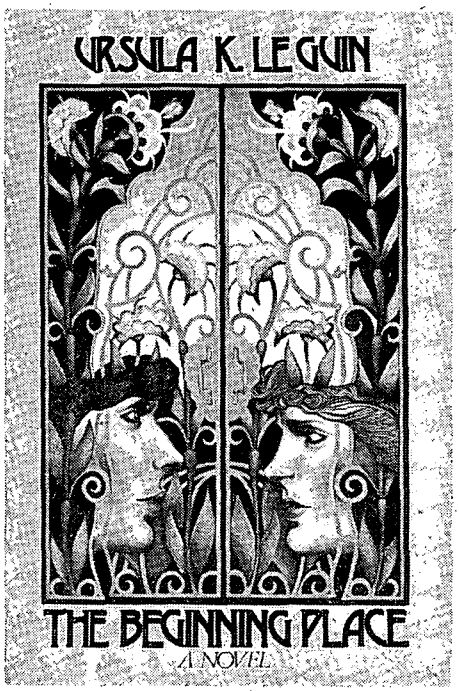

Within a few pages of the start, the second viewpoint character, Irena, is introduced. Since we have met Hugh already, we can predict that both will eventually fall in love and then unite to confront the unseen terror who will either destroy them or be destroyed by them. I don't think it's giving away too much to say this, since I believe Le Guin planned for us to make these guesses. However, after this she throws the reader some curves.

Dr. Rabkin said in *Fantastic Worlds* that fantasy readers have needs which attract them to the fantastic, and expectations and assumptions about codes in the genre. Thus, "Once upon a time there was a beautiful golden-haired princess and she fell desperately in love with a plumber named Sid," makes us upset and even indignant, not because a plumber named Sid is not plausible in the real world, but because the right ending to "Once upon a time . . ." didn't show up at the proper place.

Le Guin may be manipulating her readers by setting forth everyday details and fantasy elements in such a way as to shape our expectations for her own purposes. I admit that I might have stopped reading after a few pages had this been a first novel, thinking that this has all been done before and it is all predictable. As a writer of stature, Le Guin deserved and got further reading.

There are depths to *The Beginning Place* which will show up beneath the surface upon which the plot has been presented; these will show up during second and third readings of the book. That explains why *The Beginning Place* is superior to the first novel I unfairly brushed aside. The people in this book seem very real and there is more substance in these 183 pages that in most trilogies.

The Black Book of Clark Ashton Smith. Illustrations by Andrew Smith. *(Arkham House, Sauk City, WI 53583. $6.00.)*

Between 1919 and his death in 1961, Clark Ashton Smith used a black notebook to store, in his words: ". . . used and unused plot-germs, notes on occultism and magic, synopses of stories, fragments of verse, fantastic names for people and places, etc., etc." Arkham House has just published a transcription of the complete book in a vinyl-covered softcover edition. Added are a selection of poems and one of epigrams such as: "Sanity is the madness of the greatest number", and "All human thought, all science, all religion, is the holding of a candle to the night of the universe."

This should not be the first Smith book you read, but if you have enjoyed the stories of the author of *Lost Worlds*, *Hyberborea* and *Zothique*, then you will like this one. Smith fashioned his own style of weird tale, the story form which he stated in *The Black Book* is: "an adumbration or foreshadowing of man's relationship, past, present and future, to the unknown and infinite; and also an implication of his spiritual evolution." ▬

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Games fen will Play

by Greg Costikyan

The column deals with science fiction and historical role-playing games (as opposed to fantasy). Next issue's column will discuss the "microgame/capsule" genre of small sf and fantasy boardgames.

Several terms and abbreviations which are used in this column may not be familiar to non-gamers. A "role-playing game" (abbreviated "RPG") is one in which each player takes the part of a single person — character — in an imaginary world. Depending on the nature of the game, an imaginary world may be anything from the Ringworld to Normandy beach. "FRP" is an abbreviation for "fantasy role-playing".

BUNNIES & BURROWS ($8) from Fantasy Games Unlimited, PO Box 182, Roslyn, NY, 11576, designed by B. Dennis Sustare & Scott Robinson.

COMMANDO ($19) from Simulations Publications Inc., 257 Park Ave. S., New York, NY, 10010, designed by Eric Goldberg.

EN GARDE! ($4) from Game Designers' Workshop, 203 North St., Normal, IL, 61761; designed by Darrly Hany and Frank Chadwick.

GAMMA WORLD ($12) from TSR Games, PO Box 756, Lake Geneva, WI, 53147; designed by James Ward and Gary Jaquet.

GANGSTER! ($10) from Fantasy Games Unlimited, PO Box 182, Roslyn, NY, 11576; designed by Nick Marinacci and Pete Petrone.

SPACE QUEST ($8) from TYR Gamemakers Ltd., Box 414, Arlington, VA, 22210; designed by Paul Nyhen and George Hume.

TRAVELLER ($12), **MERCENARY** ($6) and **HIGH GUARD** ($6) from Game Designers' Workshop, 203 North St., Normal, IL, 61761; designed by Marc Miller, Frank Chadwick and Marc Miller, respectively.

VILLAINS & VIGILANTES ($8) from Fantasy Games Unlimited, PO Box 182, Roslyn, NY, 11576; designed by Jeff Dee and Jack Herman.

IN MANY ways, role-playing games are more like fiction than like traditional board games. Part of the role of fiction is to expand the mental horizons of the reader - to put him in circumstances that he would not otherwise encounter, to expose him to the thought processes of others — and thus to help him understand his world better. Fiction is no substitute for actual experience, of course; but in a sense it is or can be more than a simple diversion.

To some extent, this is also true of simulation board games. Such board games are quantitative analyses of historical situations, and can give insights that dry historical prose cannot. But these insights are not on the same personal, one-on-one level of fiction — or of role-playing games.

In a very real sense, playing a role-playing game forces a player to put himself in the shoes of another being. His actions must be consistent with the personality of that being, and he must attempt to cope with experience outside the pale of his everyday life.

It is no coincidence that many instructional games are designed along role-playing lines. Psychologists claim that play is one of the primary means by which young children learn; and it makes sense, then, that adults often learn best while playing a game. The value of games as in-

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structional tools is only now beginning to be realized, and we can expect that games will play an increasingly important role in academic instruction.

An expansion in the number and types of role-playing games has already begun. The wild success of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS shows that RPG's are capable of appealing to a much broader range of people than traditional board wargames. Most of the best-known role-playing games, it is true, have been, if not imitations of D&D, then games in the same genre — fantasy. But aside from the fact that fantasy seems to appeal to many people, there is no particular reason why role-playing games have to be fantasy based.

The primary reason that non-fantasy RPG's have played poor relation to FRP games for so long is that the gaming industry as a whole has been slow to recognize the potential of RPG's. Until recently, all of the major companies have ignored the role-playing field; and the first and best fantasy RPG's were all published by small companies. Even those companies daring enough to publish in the RPG field have stuck to the proven seller — fantasy. But with the tremendous success of D&D — Gary Gygax, co-designer of the game, has his photo in *PEOPLE*, for god's sake — it has become apparent that the market for RPG's is large and expanding.

The first non-fantasy role-playing game was EN GARDE!, designed by Darryl Hany and Frank Chadwick and published by Game Designers' Workshop in 1975. EN GARDE! is a sword-fighting RPG set in a kingdom closely resembling 17th century France. The major goal of each character is to raise his social status — by becoming a military hero, winning duels, and captivating the loveliest, wealthiest and most intelligent ladies of the kindgom. In other words, EN GARDE! is a simulation of the sort of historical romance written by Dumas, and portrayed on the screen by the likes of Errol Flynn.

EN GARDE! was innovative in a number of ways. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, it produced the first well-written set of role-playing rules. Part of the role-playing hobby's charm has always been that the innovators and leaders in the field are unknown designers and small companies; but that same fact has led to poorly organized and badly-written rules. Amateurs are capable of producing excellent work, but are often hampered because they have not developed professional skills and work habits. EN GARDE! was the first role-playing game by a major company and by established designers; and, as one might expect, it set new standards for role-playing rules — standards to which few subsequent games have risen.

EN GARDE! was also the first "closed-system" RPG. A closed-system RPG is one that does not require a gamesmaster - in which every occurance and facet of the game is covered in the rules, and all conflict can be resolved without recourse to a gamesmaster. Most RPG's are of the opposite type — "open-ended"; that is, they require a gamesmaster to create a world, devise new systems, construct adventures for the players to embark upon, and resolve conflicts. Both types of games have their good points: a closed-system game can be played as soon as the players read and understand the rules, but is limited in scope; while an open-ended game requires a massive investment of time and effort, but is limited only by the gamesmaster's imagination.

The next important — or interesting, in any case — RPG to be published was B. Dennis Sustare's and Scott Robinson's BUNNIES & BURROWS, published by Fantasy Games Unlimited in 1976. FGU is something of a maverick in the games industry; its owner, Scott Bizar is willing to publish anything he likes (well, almost anything), even if it isn't likely to sell. B&B was one of Bizar's gambles; and it did surprisingly well, considering.

BUNNIES & BURROWS is a role-playing game in which each player takes the part of a rabbit. According to the game, rabbits are reasonably intelligent, have a society and culture, and are able to manipulate tools to some extent. This is probably an overestimation of bunny capabilities, but much less would make a boring game. As it is, rabbits are severely limited — they cannot count above four, for instance ("One, two, three, four, many, many . . ."). But the limitations of the characters and the unusual situations they encounter make for a rather charming

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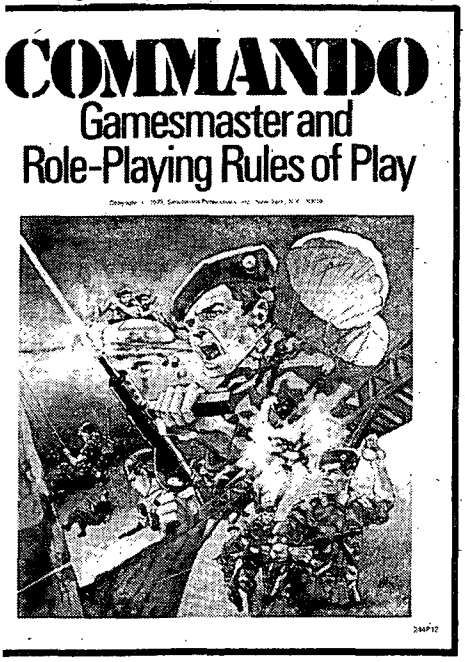
game — a refreshing change from more serious-minded RPG's. It would be difficult to run a long-term B&B campaign — at least, without acquiring a permanent belly-laugh — but the rules are pretty well written and the game amusing; it's worth looking at, anyway.



In 1977, GDW published Marc Miller's TRAVELLER, the first major science fiction RPG. Given the popularity of fantasy RPG's, the publication of science fiction RPG's was an obvious move to make; it's rather curious that there weren't any before TRAVELLER — aside from TSR's METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA, which we shall discuss later.

The term "science fiction" is a pretty broad one; specifically, TRAVELLER is designed to simulate interstellar adventure in the hard-science tradition of Larry Niven, Poul Anderson, Alexsei Panshin and the like. The gamesmaster designs a sector, stellar arm, or whatnot, decides what each planet is like, and develops societies for the major ones. Each player designs his character according to a complicated system in which he goes through several terms in the military, merchant marine, or whatnot before beginning the game. The characters then scrape up enough money to buy a ship, and set off to save the galaxy, trade, plunder a few planets — or whatever else their conniving hearts desire. Unlike other role-playing games, in TRAVELLER it is impossible for a character to develop his skills beyond the level established in the course of generating the character. The result is that the only real goals available to the players are the accumulation of riches, power, or prestige. Another problem is that some areas are not covered — such as aliens and robots.

A major advantage of TRAVELLER is that its rules are extremely well-written and organized; if anything, GDW has improved on EN GARDE!'s rules (This is especially interesting, since outside the role-playing field GDW does not have a reputation for good rules). TRAVELLER's major drawbacks are the simplicity of some of its systems — combat and world-design among them; the relatively long time needed to create characters; and that some important areas are not covered. Despite these problems, TRAVELLER remains the best science fiction RPG to date — and one of the best RPG's over all.

Since the publication of TRAVELLER, GDW has published two useful supplements — MERCENARY and HIGH GUARD. MERCENARY introduces a more complicated system for creating characters who begin in the army or marines — one which is more versatile, but also more time-consuming and thus of doubtful value. It also includes rules for large-army combat, heavy weapons, and artillery. HIGH GUARD contains a more complicated system for generating naval characters; better rules for designing interstellar ships; and rules for starship combat. Despite a number of development problems, HIGH GUARD is probably of more value than MERCENARY. Neither supplement deals with the major oversights of TRAVELLER — robots, aliens and social systems. One hopes that future supplements will cover these areas.

The other major science fiction RPG is James Wards' and Gary Jaquet's GAMMA WORLD, published in 1978 by

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Tactical Studies Rules. GAMMA WORLD is a development of TSR's earlier METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA, which dealt with a generation ship adrift among the stars — ala THE STARLOST. GAMMA WORLD uses similar systems, and is set in post-holocaust North America.

GAMMA WORLD's rules are reasonably well written, if poorly organized; they are sufficient to base a campaign upon. If there are areas they do not cover, that's to be expected; few RPG's contain really comprehensive rules.

However, GAMMA WORLD is idiotic pseudo-science. Most characters are assumed to have "mutant powers". Though there are a few unfavorable mutations, the vast majority are favorable and extremely powerful. Further, new mutations can occur when a character is subjected to radiation — not in his offspring, in him. The world is populated with monsters put together from parts of different animals, as if designed by committee. Psionic powers are omnipresent.

Whatever skills the TSR staff has, they are apparently completely innocent of science. Regardless of how much science fiction the designers have read, and how many bad movies they have seen, their game demonstrates that sf RPG's should *not* be designed by the ignorant. I'm surprised that even TSR would attempt to foist noxious junk like GAMMA WORLD off on an unsuspecting public.

The third important science fiction RPG is SPACE QUEST, published in 1977 by TYR Gamemakers (a small company), and designed by Paul Nyhen and George Hume. SPACE QUEST is 112 pages of densely-printed type, and considerably more comprehensive than either TRAVELLER or GAMMA WORLD, covering most of what both other games do. The rules are well organized and comprehensive, but poorly written. The game's major drawback is its "gosh-wow" approach; it is better designed for a Doc Smith universe than a Nivenesque one. Strange aliens, weird technology, mutant powers, and malevolent villains aren't my cup of tea — but they might be yours. In any case, at $8, SPACE QUEST is a valuable reference work for anyone interested in running a science fiction RPG.

The last year has seen the publication of a number of new role-playing games. GANGSTER!, designed by Nick Marinacci and Pete Petrone, is another game that only Fantasy Games Unlimited would publish. It is, as the name implies, a RPG in which each character is a gangster or cop. Though oriented toward the Prohibition era, rules for modern technology and police methods are included, so it is possible to simulate present-day crime. The rules are fairly simple, but cover many areas — combat, prostitution, and numbers running, for instance and include much information that gamesmasters generally wouldn't otherwise know — such as how police respond to reports of crimes, what federal and typical state laws are like, and so on. The rules are limited and simplistic — but, with a bit of work, they can be used as the basis for a campaign.

VILLAINS & VIGILANTES, designed by Jeff Dee and Jack Herman and published by FGU, is a superhero RPG — in other words, each player's character is a superhero in the Marvel/DC tradition. The designers apparently know their material; the game contains a list of 71 superhero abilities, and I can't think of any that aren't included. One silly aspect to the game is that a character's characteristics are assigned by the gamesmaster, and are supposed to be the same as the player himself — which makes some sense, but I know few brawny, muscle-bound gamers and few pot-bellied, dope-smoking super heroes. The game also suffers from "creeping D&Dism" — meaning that many of the systems are derivations of the D&D rules. I would have preferred to see more thought given to original systems better suited to the situation. As it is, VILLAINS & VIGILANTES is an interesting and worthwhile game — although it would take quite a bit of work to use it for a continuing campaign.

COMMANDO was designed by Eric Goldberg and published by Simulations Publications. I should, in all fairness, note that I was a co-developer of the game, so anything I say should be taken with a grain of salt.

COMMANDO is the first role-playing game to be published by one of the Big Two (SPI and Avalon-Hill); it is both pro-

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mising and disappointing. The rules both benefit and suffer from being written in SPI's case format system. They are well-organized, complete and unambiguous — but also repetitive, technically worded, and difficult to wade through. This is the case with almost all rules written in SPI's format.

COMMANDO'S major drawback is that it tries to be all things to all people. It is both a historical man-to-man tactical combat game and a closed-system modern-arms role-playing game. The result is that the historical game is too inaccurate, too heroic — too Hollywood — for the historical gamer; and the role-playing game is too limited in scope to satisfy the role-player.

But COMMANDO also has good points. The graphics are quite good. The system is clean and fast-moving, without sacrifice of authenticity. Twelve maps are provided with the game, allowing for innumerable different scenarios. And the game contains rules for a plethora of different types of equipment, from flamethrowers to camels, and from scuba gear to light anti-tank weapons.

Given the increasing number of RPG's published each year, they will play an increasingly important role in the gaming industry, and will continue to gain in popularity. The dearth of recent fantasy RPG's and the current predominance of non-fantasy RPG's may indicate that the fantasy market is nearly saturated — and that, as time goes on, science fiction and historical role-playing will become more important.

FILM FOCUS

ADAPTING URSULA LE GUIN'S "THE LATHE OF HEAVEN" AS A PUBLIC TELEVISION MOVIE

by Steven Dimeo

IF KEPT too long on a lathe, a piece of wood or metal being fashioned into a thing of beauty or usefulness will weaken and split. Ursula K. Le Guin invokes the metaphor in the title of her 1971 "children's" science-fiction novel *The Lathe of Heaven* derived from a nebulous Buddhist epigram suggesting that the lathe (or man's mind) which can hone perception can likewise destroy it for those who refuse "To let understanding stop at what cannot be understood" — whatever that means.

Originally published in *Amazing Science Fiction* and recognized at the time by other sources than *Booklist* as a "literate and imaginative novel with well-drawn characterizations," Le Guin's affectedly intellectual brand of science fiction here apparently means to moralize about the destructive ends of the oneirologist (dream specialist) do-gooder Dr. William Haber who, in Portland, Oregon, at the end of the 20th century, attempts to use for his own designs George Orr's uncontrolled talent for dreaming "effectively" — that is, inadvertently changing reality as a result of his dreams. Though the predominant theme is the symbolic interplay between romantic dreams and the imperfect human realities they effect (dreams thus becoming "the lathe of heaven" even if the book never mentions or elaborates upon the metaphor internally), the novel, however ambitious its intent or masterful its unusual realism, ultimately fails because Le Guin cuts too thin an initially imaginative story concept on her own psychological lathe.

Ambitious and engrossing as is PBS's $740,000 TV adaptation aired this past January, it suffers from many of the same drawbacks as the novel.

Co-authored by Roger E. Swaybill and Diane English, the teleplay nonetheless remained under Le Guin's creative control throughout though this is her first piece of fiction to be adapted. In an interview conducted in her hometown of Portland, Oregon, at the educational station KOAP-TV studios prior to the January 9th airdate, she understated her reaction to such an uncharacteristic role in the production by saying, "I am one lucky author." And her writing team does demonstrate an awareness of the demands of the new medium by streamlining the prose (which is often too scientifically technical or lengthy) with

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ironic pointedness that is still in keeping with the tone of the original's more successful passages. Further, strikingly effective visual images often rival the novel's. But the version wavers in its fanciful flight to television screens because it cannot throw off the ballast of a serious diffuseness of purpose, painful amateurishness in both acting and some of the technical effects, and a hopelessly muddled climax.

Wisely eschewing the impressive research that went into the novel and only excerpting key lines form dialogue among the three principal characters, the teleplay, for example, underplays the conflict with wry irony when it doesn't resort to overstated histrionics. To illustrate, Haber (Kevin Conway) at one point offers Orr's lawyer/lover Heather Lelache (Margaret Avery) the standard oversimplification from popular psychology: "Neurotics build castles in the sky; psychotics live in them." To which Lelache replies, "And psychologists collect the rent." Later, just after Haber "cures" Orr and prepares to use the Dream Augmentor himself for his utilitarian utopia of "the greatest good for the greatest number," George Orr (Bruce Davison) makes a hopeless recommendation to which Haber responds all too appropriately, "I'll sleep on it."

Such irony, too little in evidence, would have been even more effective visually rather than verbally, but Le Guin herself has affirmed the importance of this element in that same interview by concluding of the overall story, "I think it's kind of funny." Despite the paucity of verbal wit, coproducer-directors David Loxton and Fred Barzyk along with cinematographer Robbie Greenberg do bring off impressively original visual interpretations in their own right even if they have to sidestep the original's images in the process. Apparently because of the practical demands of the production, they choose to give up on central symbols from the novel. Mt. Hood, which dominates

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Portland's eastern skyline, does more than start the novel as a photograph in Haber's office which Orr alters in his first session to one of the champion racehorse Tammany Hall. Later, a pile of excrement from another dream is said to resemble the mountain. And in the apocalyptic climax Mt. Hood, clearly a symbol of both dominance and tranquillity, erupts to wreak havoc on the city. Only the effects are seen in the film — a necessary compromise because of budgetary restrictions — and the dormant volcano never reappears after the beginning of the film. In Haber's final attempt to cure Orr (by having his patient dream an effective dream about losing the power to dream effectively), Orr tries and fails to change the office poster back to one of Mt. Hood. Similarly lost in the film is the significance that the Aliens (Aldeberanians) come in the shape of giant turtles, any verbal explanation probably having been considered too ludicrous. But that beautifully rendered slow-motion scene shot in fog when, as he dreams them into existence, a naked Orr rises to watch a turtle swimming above him to the ocean surface assumes meaning only if we know that Le Guin in the novel uses a quotation from Victor Hugo at the beginning of Chapter Seven that concludes, "The dream is the aquarium of Night." The Aliens, in other words, are meant to be an embodiment of Orr's own power to make the dreams real.

Still, the team from the television laboratory at WNET 13 in New York employs devices of its own that bring that theme to light. Most notable is the subtly symbolic way Orr's dream solution to overpopulation is conveyed. In the novel he imagines a grisly scene of a mass burial of hundreds of nude corpses. Here we see the characters at a lush banquet table enjoying food and drink until slowly all the figures besides the three main characters take on veils to hide their ashen faces before vanishing completely from the table. An evocative image to communicate the return of the Black Plague! Afterwards, when Orr realizes the full impact of his having in effect murdered six billion people, the camera catches him sitting on railway tracks where they divide in two, again a properly placed visualization of his own self-conflict pointing up the Kierkegaardian "either/or" choices implicit in his name.

Although the gimmick is imitative of more pioneering directors like Michelangelo Antonioni, camera angles also tend to miniaturize Orr and Haber against the futuristic architecture — from above, for example, down a red carpeted corridor as Haber demonstrates his greater power over Orr by putting him instantly to sleep just as Part I ends; or from below as Haber looks down imperiously through the glass and concrete walls of his just-realized dream of an Oregon Oneirological Institute of his own. Such attention makes the location shooting at Dallas' Hyatt Regency Hotel, Fort Worth's Tandy Center and Dallas' city hall and airport an integral part of the human story, stressing the ultimate powerlessness of all the characters. Nor can Loxton and Barzyk resist tossing in their own "stargate" sequence to surprisingly good effect: in the throes of his final self-destructive dream that rends apart the earth beneath Portland, Haber is seen silhouetted against a spiraling blue laser beam cone of light, struggling like a shadow that cannot break free from its own darkness.

Even so, we keep wondering throughout the film whether it wouldn't have been much more successful as a half-hour teleplay. For the movie pads out the major dreams that structure the novel: Orr's reshaping the Mt. Hood poster to one of a horse; his stopping the rain by bringing a two-year drought (fully dramatized in the movie as it is not in the book since this more dramatic example is the one that convinces Haber of Orr's power); solving overpopulation by bringing back the Black Plague; ending war on earth by inventing the common threat of extraterrestrial Aldeberanians landing on the colonized moon; Lelache's hypnotizing Orr to dream of getting the aliens off the moon when he has them do just that —by invading Earth; erasing racial discrimination by turning everyone's skin gray; and, after relieving Orr of his power, Haber's personal effort with the Dream Augmentor to make heaven on earth that results in wholesale devastation. This list exemplifies the problem: the story tries to cover too many diverse subjects. After Orr turns the rain to 105° temperatures year-round, the point's

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THE LATHE OF HEAVEN: (L to R) Bruce Davison, Margaret Avery and Kevin Conway are the featured performers in THE LATHE OF HEAVEN, a two-hour film adaptation of Ursula K. Le Guin's futuristic novel about a man whose dreams literally come true.

already been made: realized dreams are too real to be like the dreams that conceived the reality. In both novel and film, Le Guin would have been better advised to select, say, three key dreams (the standard fairy tale symmetry) to get her message across.

And while every attempt is made to pare dialogue to emphasize only character conflict, the movie at the same time chooses to include scenes not taken from the novel that do not advance either character or plot development. What useful purpose, for instance, does it serve to follow Orr's first session with Haber (his punishment for using drugs to stave off the dreams) with a scene where a clerk processes Orr's prescription for a new drug? Or why reiterate unnecessarily their romantic involvement by including an interlude between Orr and Lelache at Orr's government-lottery prize, a cabin on the Oregon coast at Agate Beach? And while it suggests an inventive approach, why juxtapose a semi-nude scene between Orr and his black lawyer-turned-wife with Haber in a robe as the new High Priest of Mechanically Augmented Dreams? One scene that is extracted directly from the novel — when Orr receives from an Aldeberanian junk dealer the Beatles' record "With a Little Help from My Friends" — should in truth have been omitted altogether; its sentiment is not only out of place thematically but embarrassingly overstated when it convinces Orr to bring his black lover back into his real world (for some reason she vanishes when he changes everybody's skin gray). Such scenes only point up the cerebral aimlessness that is the real Black Plague in this story.

More than this overly ambitious attempt to encompass the story of man in less than two hours, what helps bring this mind trip to its Goliath end is the amateurishness of the acting (with one notable exception) and of the visuals, especially in the case of the extraterrestrials. Though Le Guin asserted in the interview that everyone "did a beautiful job of acting," Bruce Davison makes the 32-year-old George Orr a screeching adolescent, not the vaguely troubled designer from the novel, and Margaret Avery just seems ill at ease in the underdeveloped (sadly, in both respects) character of the black lawyer. The strength of the film is both Kevin Conway and the character he plays, William Haber. Conway, who has most recently co-starred with Sylvester Stallone in "Paradise Alley" and "F.I.S.T." makes it easiest for us to empathize with a character whose name itself suggests a kind of "Everyman" wish — the "will" to "have" (if "Haber" means to remind us of the German verb "haben"), in this case to have dreams be real, however flawed their realizations. Conway's performance alone accounts for the interest that carries the viewer to the "fin de siecle" finale — though the high school thespianism of his adversaries certainly helps enhance the

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attractiveness of his "evil".

Also detracting from a credible reality amid these unrealities are the special effects and alien accoutrements. Here Le Guin underlined that "the motto for the production was 'less is more' " — the proper goal, but one never adhered to in this or any of the movie's other aspects. In the December, 1979, *Future Life* preview, Loxton also emphasized they never intended to compete on the same scale as "Star Wars". But the superimposed light images supposed to be the Aldeberanian flying saucers are too obviously phony as they whip over the heads of Orr and Lelache. While the lights speeding down from the moon work, everyone would have been better off had they confined themselves elsewhere to the *effects* of the sightings on the faces of the characters, thus leaving actual depiction of this reality to our imaginations. The same is true for the aliens. The appearance of the first, a towering turtle with a head lighted up like another better idea from Ford, is somewhat offset by the ethereal mist swirling about him and by his Brahman-like utterances — from "do unto others" to the typically paradoxical and concluding "To go is to return". But here again, actual depiction of the creature injures the subtlety and significance of the movie's intent.

And if that intent is clear at the beginning, it certainly isn't at the end where the murkiness makes us wonder how the book ever got dubbed a "children's book." Though Le Guin insisted in that interview that it's meant to be "a happy ending," we never know if it's because the too-upwardly-mobile Haber gets his comeuppance,or because Orr loses his innocent talent for dreaming effectively. With Haber committed to an asylum, are we actually to rejoice that Orr now has nothing more at the end but an Earth infested with giant turtles hawking "junque" and junk food? In the novel, Mt. Hood's disastrous eruption results from a judgmental dismissal of Haber's "emptiness of being," presumably because he had the gall to aspire to Orr's mental heights. In the movie Haber's psychological self-destruction is even more ambiguous. No one ever states it explicitly but the moral seems to hang on Lord Acton's famous saying about absolute power corrupting absolutely. Since the novel was written at the start of a decade marked by student demonstrations against the Vietnam war and the growing discontent among minorities and women, and since it does concern a frustrated young dreamer who resorts to drugs when he cannot control the world around him as well as a black woman lawyer who likewise has no power either to help him or fight Haber, we can't help but wonder if Nixon might not have been the partial inspiration for William Haber. The problem is that we never see Haber attain to any *real power*. For that matter, what *is* the dream that precipitates apocalypse — a *general* one for world peace or world power, or a specific one deriving from his own life? Only the latter would make any humanistic sense since the former seems purely an academic exercise. In any case, we never find out either way.

Two other poorly placed references from Orr in the film only muck up the works all the more. After Orr has just colored everybody's face gray (while ours must turn red), he leaves Haber with an idea that has already occurred to us: what if everybody else had the same power as Orr and reality was contingent merely on the whims of every individual? The thought also forces us to consider how or why someone like Orr ever gained such power in the first place. Then later Orr confesses to Lelache that the "real" reality occurred four years before when he woke up and found that a nuclear war had already ended the world! Does all this mean *nothing* has been real throughout the movie, a concept that comes dangerously close to juvenile cliche for science fiction? Even if that were true, what would such an authorial coup de grace say about the movie's purpose that hasn't already been said more effectively with his first two "effective" dreams? These pivotal remarks only underscore an affected obfuscation that defuses the potential of a movie that at the outset tries to humanize the power and disillusionment of dreams made real. Deleting those red herrings and showing only Haber in the asylum from a nervous breakdown (however broadly trite it is to see him literally "burnt out" by a push for self-realization and global amelioration) would have made all the more disquietingly quiet that long shot at the movie's end when Orr

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and Lelache buy their hot dogs or ice cream cones from an Aldeberanian vendor at the very top of the screen above the steps of a gold-lit fountain.

Such entrancing imagistic statements cannot absolve "The Lathe of Heaven" of its fragmented aimlessness and qualitative inconsistencies. PBS has unwittingly given us another George Orr dream in this very dramatization: visual realization never matches the caliber of the dream. That is, in a way, though, the story of man, after all. As Milton's own more attractive "evil-doer" Satan tells us in *Paradise Lost*,

> The mind is its own place, and in itself
> Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.

"The Lathe of Heaven" hasn't shaped either end, roughhewn as it is. But the sheer act of trying for one or the other at the beginning of this new decade is somewhat encouraging for what is to come, not just from PBS in its projected series of literate science fiction dramatizations, but for man in his own imperfectly-shaped future.

THE SPECTROSCOPE

A Funny Thing Happened

by Robert Wilcox

Sometimes people take themselves much too seriously. This is never good. The remedy, of course, is comic relief, which can lend even the lowliest moments of life a laugh or two. Science fiction is fraught with such possibilities and Bob Wilcox examines this aspect of the art in the following article. Some fine examples of humor in this issue are Wayne Wightman's "The Imprecise Delights of Love", K.L. Jones' "A Visit With Lenny" and Brad Linaweaver's "The Competitor".

Most of us who read science fiction do so for a great number of reasons: it's different, it looks toward the future, it takes us out of ourselves. But one quality above all others makes science fiction more attractive than any other form of writing — its humor.

There is more humor in science fiction, for instance, than you can find in "mainstream" writing. There is satire, of course, a form of humor which is relatively common in the disillusioned works of today. But other aspects — incongruity, surprise, word play, sight gags, and the like — are widely and usefully employed by the authors of science fiction to accomplish artful and constructive ends which might not be so readily achieved through other means. So we may profitably examine the evidences and nature of humor in science fiction, and find out why it has made us all readers of this form of literature.

The craft of science fiction rests upon technical qualities not always apparent to the casual reader, but these are essential if any story is to be successful. When we read a work we know only that we've liked or disliked it — not why. Usually, though, if a story "works" it is because of a partnership among plot, characterization, and setting. Persons have problems or obstacles which they must solve or overcome, and their efforts to do so occur in a specific environment. All of these concerns work together, each in some fashion contributing to the development of the other two. Our hero, for example, may be just an ordinary fellow. But one day, while walking in a certain region, he meets a strange human-like creature who is being beaten by a gang of children. He rescues this being, takes him home, heals him, and as a result discovers in his automobile's engine compartment a gleaming sphere which powers the car eternally without apparent need of fuel. If he had not been the kind of character he was, and had not gone walking in that particular setting, he would not have gained this wonderful prize — and the world of readers would have been deprived of a charming science fiction story.

Not to lose the thread of humor from this example, suppose that deep understanding between our hero and the alien is possible because each has a well-developed sense of humor. In fact, suppose communication begins between them because of *differences* in what is regarded as humorous. Edgar Rice Burroughs used such a tack in his famous *Princess of Mars*,

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where the green men of Barsoom found hilarious the brutal blow laid upon Dejah Thoris by one of their number. This cruel act, as he saw it, galvanized John Carter into action, and launched a romantic tale which was to require several novels to unfold. Humor in this instance not only arrested the reader's attention, along with that of Carter, but it revealed Carter's character and advanced the plot of the story.

Humor, then, can be important to science fiction in the influence it exerts upon plot, character, and setting. By modifying these essential ingredients of writing, humor is not only enjoyable in its own right but serves as a catalyst in creating an effective story. Some facets of humor, of course, are more useful than others. Among these, satire, incongruity, the unexpected, and word play work most effectively within the examples which follow.

SATIRE

Satire is a form of humor tracing its beginning to Greek and Latin writers: Archilocus, Simonides, Aristophanes, Horace, Lucian, and like figures. Its use was refined and extended in Western literature by such authors as Erasmus, Butler, Pope, Boileau, and Voltaire, who stressed the qualities of ridicule and mockery over the more gentle efforts of earlier writers. Classically, it is an effective way to express disapproval. In science fiction, while the air of rejection is often present, satire can be seen as a positive, constructive force. Sometimes the satire pervades the entire span of a novel or short story, so that it is difficult to separate it from the matrix.

The Demolished Man, by Alfred Bester, fairly reeks with satire. Reich, the antagonist, thumbs his nose at authority — which is humorous in light of his name ("empire," in German). Law and order are mocked by his deliberate act of murder, in full awareness of the penalty it would bring, and he chooses a unique way to frustrate that justice. The saturation of his thoughts with "Tenser, said the Tensor" not only masks the overt knowledge of guilt in his mind, but the zany song itself satirically comments on the futility of social order with "Tension, apprehension, and dissention have begun". Such boldness sharpens the plot conflict, and heightens the contrast of good and evil within the story. It describes Reich's character, almost ennobling him in his defiance and making his ultimate fall more dramatic and heroic. Satire in this work often increases reader sympathy for Reich, possibly suggesting that Lincoln Powell is not so admirable in his determination to bring Reich to justice and demolition. And that punishment carries tremendous satirical force, for the reader fears it as much as Reich does. Then, when the definition of "demolition" is realized, the reader is torn between apprehension and relief. It isn't death, as is conventionally expected — or is it?

Similar shock is experienced in Asimov's famous short story "Nightfall." Satire is introduced by the title, which suggests the fears one has as a child when darkness falls. Emerson's ecstatic statement that man might more fully appreciate the glory of God with a single appearance of stars each thousand years sets up the reader for the sardonic acknowledgment of the true state of man's attitude at the end of the story. These preliminary applications of satire in a sense wind the spring of reader interest and assist the author to accomplish his dramatic contrast. Theremon, the journalist, is a mockery of journalistic restraint and objectivity; his name is close enough to that of an early musical device to suggest a satirical tone. Most effective of all, however, is the reversal in the story of accepted roles held by science and religion. The faith of the astronomers concerning the apocalyptic event stands in almost inspiring contrast to the destructive frenzy encouraged by the Cultists among the terrified populace. Philosophically, one can also derive from the contrast of light and dark a satirical comment about the relative stability of knowledge and ignorance; it required six suns to supply the light for these people, and a single shadow of doubt to eclipse it.

The so-called "New Wave" of science fiction writers, of course, obtain enormous value from satirical humor. Ballard's "Subliminal Man", for example, places Franklin (free man) against Hathaway (has a way?) in a setting of maniacal consumption of all sorts of products. In Ballard's world are constant, ubiquitous urgings to buy and to consume — only a slight extension

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of the reader's quality today. Franklin appears willing to consider any evidence Hathaway presents (the Surgeon General warns, and all that sort of thing), and Hathaway does his best to point out the colossal conspiracy of producers. But in the end Franklin is a consumer still, and so are the readers — in spite of Ballard's plausible sermon about the perils. Franklin's character is displayed as a composite of us all, vacillating and uncertain, victim of the insanity of his environment. The "Good Life" is roundly satirized, possession of material things is ridiculed with the same tight grin that must have suffused the face of Jonathan Swift as he detailed the adventures of Lemuel Gulliver.

In these three examples most writers and critics would agree that satire emerges as the writers' intention, that we can see the mocking and ridicule because all the clues for such interpretation have been planted for our discovery. It is possible, however, for a reader to obtain a satirical impression from a work despite the author's best wishes to the contrary. Such a possibility attaches to Leinster's "Proxima Centauri", which details an Earth expedition to another star system. The spacecraft is impressively described as to size, equipment, motive power, and the like. Most readers at any age would agree that a ship five thousand feet in diameter is impressive; and that it had been traveling through space for seven years attests to the determination of its crew. Early in the story, however, a melodramatic competition for THE GIRL is sketched which contrasts the able but forbidding second in command of the ship and the real hero, a scrambling young rocket engineer who is beyond the pale because he has joined in an earlier mutiny. The confrontations of these two, and their conversations, are laughable. For example, after the ship has been invaded by Centaurians our hero, Jack, is infuriated at the "sellout" by his rival. After a word from that individual, however, Jack apologizes and says the officer can count on his support. This hasty transition suggests to some readers a sort of dime-novel satire, as does the easy capture of the Earth vessel by beings who are actually plants and who speak *woodenly*. Finally, the only way out of this dire predicament appears to be allowing the aliens to take the captured ship to their planet, where it is exploded to destroy *everything* — but leaving Jack and the girl on another planet to carry on, or whatever. The humor in this story is inescapable, but one doubts that Leinster intended laughter to bubble up in so many places.

INCONGRUITY

If one attended a formal church wedding and saw among the guests an individual wearing blue jeans and tennis shoes, he would probably find the image amusing. While he might not analyze his reaction exactly, he would agree it was a funny experience because the clothing of that person was not appropriate, did not fit the occasion. That sort of thing is behind the humor of incongruity, the encounter with elements which don't match. Science fiction stories often incorporate deliberate mismatches, paradoxically, to add character and strength to their objectives.

A story by Frederic Brown, "The Waveries", is in part incongruous, and the attentive reader finds it amusing without depreciating the tale because Brown's evident intention is to amuse. Earth has been invaded by entities which subsist on energy. All electrical sources are their targets, and as a result powered mechanisms fail everywhere. Electric lights go out, automobile ignitions no longer operate, industry grinds to a halt. The reader is prepared for the incongruous conclusion to the story by the plot development and by the characters who implement it. George Bailey, for example, is a drunk and his girlfriend, Maisie, is scarcely an intellectual heavyweight. The loss of technological advantages is perceived by individuals such as these, and the reader is humored into accepting conditions as they develop. He agrees that the invaders eat electricity, that communication and transportation systems fail, that horse-and-buggy economy was the logical outcome. And then he stumbles over that incongruity: he hears distant rolling thunder, and sadly longs for lightning! It is the crowning joke — thunder without lightning. And every reader who has cringed beneath a streak of heavenly fire and awaited the rumble that followed knows that he has been gulled by this author.

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Recent close observations of Mars have shattered dreams of someday establishing lasting relationships with the natives of that planet as described so entrancingly by Burroughs. It now appears that Mars is just another broken promise, a wind-torn desert inhospitable to even microscopic life forms. That was not Stanley Weinbaum's wish, however, as he described Dick Jarvis' journey in "A Martian Odyssey". Oh, the air was uncomfortably thin, but substantial enough to support life. That life, however, was not appropriate to what Dick had expected. Imagine an ostrich-like being which carried a little black bag around its neck, and which could jump seventy-five feet into the thin atmosphere to land on its pointed beak. The picture of this curious creature is vividly drawn, its incredible antics described, so that soon the reader discards his uneasiness at being shown a creature that didn't "fit" his preconceptions of a Martian. Tweel's capers are charming, adding greatly to an interesting narrative as he becomes "Tick's" tour guide. The tremendous impact of his incongruity comes, though, when he is revealed as a survivor of an ancient civilization whose achievements were mighty and whose servants were — men. That mismatch is emphasized with great effect, and Tweel the ostrich becomes not only an enchanting character but a speculative key to ancient civilizations of Earth.

Lacking Tweel's charm, but possessing even greater powers, was the validusian derg of Robert Sheckley's "Protection". This invisible being was incongruous in both absence of the usual evidence of existence and in its choice of language. When the human asks where he is, the reply from nowhere is, "Gronish", which scarcely matched the question. That the derg anticipates coming events is also a mismatch, as is our hero's apparent talking to himself while accompanied by this invisible creature. Throughout the account the reader runs into strings of incongruities, words he doesn't understand, conversations about incomprehensible conditions and creatures. Above all, he finds that the hero must not lesnerize, and this warning draws him all through the story to other incongruities, until he learns that the entire fabric is incongruous — and hilarious at the end.

"Sword Game", by H.H. Hollis, is a topological mismatch, in which a mathematics teacher adopts as his mistress a runaway from a carnival — a funny and unlikely alliance. The teacher constructs a tesseract, an incongruity of time and space, in which he imprisons his inamorata when she becomes an inconvenience. She thus serves as a paperweight for his desk. Years later, a new student appears before him, learns of the tesseract and contents, fashions a moebius strip which unlocks the tesseract from which the girl emerges, and the young man imprisons the old teacher within the vacated structure. The incongruous part of this incongruous story is that the young student looks exactly like the teacher as a youth. This maze puzzles and amuses the reader, who by this time has completely surrendered to the tale's illogical makeup.

THE UNEXPECTED

A near-relative to the fun of incongruity is the humor met in unexpected events or experiences. These may also be mismatches, of course, but usually they are like an experience of an American soldier during his first encounter with French peasants. He had been crawling about the countryside all day, trying his best to stay alive, when he spied a farm building outside of which was mounted a spigot. By then parched, he eagerly thrust his canteen cup beneath the spout, turned the tap, and received — a stream of cattle urine which had been collected for fertilizer. It was a funny story as he later told it, but at the time he had expected a greater reward.

Asimov uses the unexpected often in his stories. One, "The Singing Bell", is a kind of detective story in which the villain very cleverly steals from the Moon a forbidden natural treasure. The rogue is so careful in his preparations, covering all possible tracks, that the readers feel assured that his crime — which includes murder — will escape discovery and punishment. The trick in this tale is simply gravity. When the detective investigating the affair tosses the precious lunar bell at the villain, the latter's behavior betrays his having recently been exposed to the much-reduced gravity of the Moon. This is unexpected of both vil-

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lain and reader, giving the account a delightful twist, and demonstrating that the characters involved were, in the end, victims of an all-pervading but often overlooked natural force. The joke, then, is on both parties.

There have been many science fiction yarns which use the end-of-the-world theme for effect. Often, these picture a stalwart hero and beautiful heroine clinging desperately to each other, facing an exploding sun or some other eschatological device. We see the final pair of humans as highly desirable specimens, tributes to superior breeding, fitting representatives of the race at the last trump.

Damon Knight had other ideas in "Not With a Bang". Rolf Smith is only one letter away from being a predator, while Louise Oliver is the epitome of justifiable spinsterhood. These unlikely characters are dining in the ruins of a department store, he proposing their union and she holding out for all the trappings of a respectable marriage. Not only are these people totally unlike what the reader would expect at the end of the world, but their setting is a travesty on all the moonlight and roses ever concocted over the centuries. Knight has cast them cunningly, however, for despite their uncomely attributes they arouse within the reader the urge that they merge, if only for the good of the race. Rolf needs her for another reason, too: to administer the serum against the plague which has ravaged the world. She has already been conveniently at hand when he had frozen into immobility and was helplessly awaiting the end. What an unexpected ending to this story, then, when Rolf has an attack behind the closed door of the men's room with a prude on the other side. The humor of this account is grim, true, but it effectively contributes to both characters and denouement as no other element could.

"It's Great to be Back", by Robert Heinlein, fairly screams of the unexpected from the time Allan and Josephine MacRae pack up and take off for Earth. They had grumbled for years about the "pressurized rabbit warren", as they described their quarters on the Moon. To Jo, especially, it was like getting out of jail, and as they approached Earth she could scarcely see that gorgeous planet through her tears of happiness. It would be heaven to attend a real live opera once again, to play golf and to ski, to feel the caress of rain. The unexpected struck with the onset of Earth gravity, under which Jo felt almost powerless to move. Then in rapid succession came the unexpected cold, the filthy atmosphere, a virus infection, faulty plumbing, snide criticisms by earthlings — and the unexpected conclusion, where the reader learns that the story's title refers to the Moon, not to Earth. One can be amused by the series of disappointing contrasts between the two sets of living conditions, and can share in the sense of dismay which often accompanies efforts to "go back". Heinlein has tricked his audience with this fabric of almost trite wishfulness, has made it work through the viewpoint of frail woman, and has accomplished by the dashing of her expectations the final shock which both delights and satisfies.

WORD PLAY

A final element can be found in the linguistic agility shown by many writers of science fiction. With most stories, short and long, the reader notes that language is really a musical instrument, that authors play in shifting modes and keys, and that the entire tonality of a work — perhaps we could say its "humor" — is fixed by the dominance of word play.

Sometimes the play involves only a couple of words, as in R.A. Lafferty's "This Grand Carcass Yet". Here are just the simple elements of a business, an entrepreneur and the latest machine to make the business run efficiently. Juniper Tell turned matters over to his Generalized Agenda Harmonizer Nucleus (GAHN), at which point all sorts of anomalies began to turn up. GAHN gave suggestions and commands to other machines, which then complained to Tell about GAHN's pushiness. The reader sees the humor of all this when the business becomes Tell and Gahn — which pretty well describes what has proceeded from the "harmonizer's" machinations.

The pun is an important manifestation of word play, often contributing great value to an author's intent. Thus, when Kornbluth has Hawkins search out buried metal in "The Marching Morons", it seems fitting that Barlow is resurrected as a "real estate dealer, uncorrupted by time". Corruption is everywhere in this story: twenty-

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two-cent dollars, cars racing along at 25 kph, racehorses with no class, average IQ of 45, three million "slaves" of five billion morons.

Elsewhere, Herbert has the head of a family in "The Nothing" observe that if the government isn't safe, then nothing is. The mother in Suzette Elgin's "For the Sake of Grace" has so little to do that she has much time to brood. Sam Clay in Padgett's "Private Eye" is subject to all sorts of moral weakness; Worden has charge of a lunar prisoner in "Keyhole"; Garnett is a difficult companion in Clarke's "The Sentinel"; Fowler is the chief human force in Simak's "City" to bring about the civilization of dogs.

Transliteration sometimes accomplishes a humorous end even more directly, as with Bester's "The Pi Man". The protagonist here has difficulty with language, asking all sorts of questions in visually provocative fashion, as:

I
must
go
back
but
not
to

or in the layout of the house he occupies:

Bedroom Foyer

Bath

Bath

Living Room

Bedroom

Kitchen

Terrace

T
e
r
r
a
c
e

or in the luncheon he has ordered:

Martini Martini

Martini

Croque M'sieur Roquefort

Salad

Coffee

Two little gems by Grendel Briarton suitably wrap up this examination of humor in science fiction. In one, Ferdinand Feghoot has returned to Earth after escaping from the gigantic Aah-ookians. But his captivity had not been unpleasant, as he had lived in an apartment hollowed in a false tooth of one of his captors — as an indentured servant. The other is really more atrocious, dealing with time travel of Feghoot and young son to Hawaii for an old-fashioned luau of human flesh. When they themselves were threatened with the pot, Feghoot adroitly arranged to eat instead of be eaten. The son protested his distaste for man; father urged him to eat, observing: "One man's meat is another man's poi, son."

Humor of considerable dimension is thus found throughout science fiction. It may at times be trivial and superficial but, as with the examples above, it often contributes substantially to authors' purposes. Satire, incongruities, the unexpected, and word play offer considerable weight to the development of plot, characterization, and setting. They add flexibility and complexity to story development and make the literature of science fiction not only more readable but more durable and memorable as well. ■

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A FULL-LENGTH FANTASY NOVEL

by Darrell Schweitzer

part 2:

The Magician's Daughter

Synopsis of Part I

IN THE beginning, when Morosa Etewah dreamed the gods and the Earth into being, Rannon the boar-headed one fell out of harmony with the rest. Later, when mankind came into existence, he caused much terror and distress until at last the gods fought him on the Plain of Leboladen. Vast and unimaginable was that battle, but the victory was Rannon's, and ever since he has ruled over the world without opposition as Lord of Death. No magic may overcome him. No spirit dares risk his anger.

Prince Throdexon has been ruler of the isle of Iankoros since early childhood, but he has grown up of a dreamy and poetical disposition, probably not suited to rule. The gov-

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Illustrated by Gary Freeman

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ernment he has always left in the hands of his regent, the wizard Zio Theremderis. Eventually the affairs of the outside world intrude on Throdrexon. A marriage is arranged for him. A war breaks out on the mainland, and he must lead his troops. All is still going well, however, for he finds he loves his bride, Hamakara, and he wins much glory in battle.

Than Rannon intervenes. The Prince returns home to find his pregnant bride has succumbed to a plague. Beside himself with grief, he sets out on a rash course, much to Theremderis' horror. First, he conjures up the spirit Gladziri, and demands of him certain knowledge of the lands beyond life. The impudent spirit obliges, but the Prince finds he has far less control than he thinks. While Gladziri is unable to enter the magic circle in which Throdrexon stands, he is able to pelt him with stones until he lies on the edge of death. Recovery is slow, but Throdrexon is resolute. He builds a magic boat which carries him to the northern edge of the world, following the path of all funeral ships to the entrance of the Underearth, the domain of Rannon, where the dead are tormented endlessly by the mad god regardless of what good or ill deeds they might have done in their lifetimes. There is no moral order in the universe, as Theremderis has explained, and the best anyone can hope for is a few short years of happiness won by a desperate, defensive struggle against Rannon. Death is all-powerful, he says. But Throdrexon seems to prevail. After much peril, he rescues Hamakara, bearing her back into the upper world in a sack. Now, since she is still dead, her body a mass of corruption, he must bring her back to Iankoros and restore her to life by means of forbidden magic. Kanetekelei, the gigantic idiot-demon son of Rannon, pursues Throdrexon back to his isle, but is easily dispatched with the aid of the magic sword Dran, an ancient heirloom of the Lords of Iankoros. The Prince orders the huge corpse buried, and thinks his troubles from that quarter are over.

They aren't. Theremderis, wandering across the isle after the Prince has refused to listen to his advice, is the first to discover that the corpse of the godling has swollen up out of the ground into an immense mass of powdery-white contagion, which spreads on the wind, reducing all living things in its path to dust. Theremderis rushes back to Throdrexon's tower, but the Prince, totally obsessed with his magic, will not listen to him or take any notice of the consequences of his actions. In a fit of insane rage he murders his old teacher with Dran, stuffing body and severed head in a sack.

The tower is sealed. Throdrexon survives, but everyone else on the isle perishes, and the white death settles silently over all. Rannon cannot be opposed, and Throdrexon is unable to return his beloved to life. But, because her unborn child has not yet lived, and thus has not been claimed by death, Hamakara is delivered of a living daughter, Amadel.

"THE MAGICIAN'S DAUGHTER"

Chapter 9: A Midnight Conversation

AS THE hours came and went, and new days were born under the sun and bright sky, the Prince felt the madness retreat a little, but still it weighed heavily on his mind. The horror of his situation and the knowledge of his deeds remained, and it was from this knowing that he sensed his all but vestigial control slipping. His future disintegration was clearer than any prophecy could ever

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be, a thing inevitable yet to be resisted, a battle to be fought uphill with great pain and great effort which would ultimately prove futile, yet still a battle to be fought with grace and valor, in hopes of gaining a little time.

He busied himself with tasks. The seals on the windows and on the door had been broken already. The air was safe; the poison fled from the land. Not a trace of the white powder was to be found anywhere, not even indoors where the winds often wandered and died, not pressed into the cracks between the stones or piled into corners. It was as if the stuff had been recalled by its creator as soon as the need for it had passed.

Throdrexon descended the winding stairs of his tower slowly, with the baby asleep in his arms. On those steps, and on the floor below them were scattered cloaks and helmets, shields, swords, spears and sandals; reminders of the messengers who had knocked and were not answered. The bodies were gone though, even to the skeletons, and the tower had the feeling of an ancient tomb, dry, dust-filled and cleansed with years.

Outside in the courtyard one corpse did remain, that of Theremderis who had dropped there after the infection was over. He was still within the sack, but the end had broken open with the impact and the head had rolled out. It lay facing the doorway as Throdrexon emerged, its eyes rolled up so only the whites showed, its bloodstained hair and beard ruffling slightly in a slight breeze, giving it a momentary appearance of life.

When the prince saw this he stopped, and yet he felt no revulsion at the sight, no dread of his guilt, only a dull remorse. His emotions were purged from him, and he knew them only dimly like a half forgotten fantasy, as an old eunuch knows manhood when he daydreams. All he could bring himself to say was, "So, wizard, you are still here. I had thought you were gone but you are not. You remain to haunt me, I guess, and it is only fitting."

There was not even any sadness in his voice. He stood for a while gazing into the empty face, then walked on and came to the feasting hall where he had first glimpsed the shy daughter of the foreign King. This place was a ruin, the tables smashed, the high throne overturned by someone in a final spasm of panic. The clothing of the doers lay about, and the place was very still and clean, and the father's footsteps echoed distantly as he carried his daughter through the room. He came at last to the nursery where he himself had once lain; this had once been a pleasant place with sunlight shining in through wide windows, and colorful murals decorating the walls. Now it was faded and filled with dust.

He shifted the child to one arm, and with his free hand opened the shutters once more, as they had not been opened in many years. This nursery was a special place, used only by the direct heirs of the line, and it often was untouched for decades if a Prince were not prolific.

A crib stood in the middle of the room. He blew the dust from it, and shook the tiny mattress in the air. Still it was soiled, so he gave it a command, "Be cleansed," and it was. Then he replaced it and laid the infant Amadel atop it. He spoke again, summoning spirits out of the air, forming them into chambermaids with feather brushes. They set to work at once with superhuman speed, rid the room of all taint in a matter of minutes, then vanished into the air from which they had been called, their forms held together only by a will now relaxed.

Throdrexon laughed lightly and said to the baby, "What an inspiration you are. If I had bothered to do that before, this place would always have been spotless."

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He walked over to the window and looked out over the rolling hills, now brown and naked, and to the sea beyond.

"You shall abide here a while;" he said, "as I did once, and I hope you shall love this place as I did when I was small."

Then he reached out the window, straining over the sill, until he caught up a handful of dry earth. He spat on it, and formed it in his palm into a rough figure, then spoke a formula and the dirt grew heavy. He let it drop, but before it touched the floor a middle-aged woman stood before him, completely still, her face without expression.

The Prince snapped his fingers in front of her eyes, and said, "Be awakened, and care for my daughter."

So it was that Amadel was reared by a nursemaid who became dust again each night while she slept, then reformed when the sunlight touched her. Her breasts gave forth no milk, so Throdrexon reached far beyond the sea with his magic and stole from cows a thousand leagues away, causing farmers to curse and lay the blame on snakes, elves, and local witches mostly. It was certainly the most humble task ever performed by one skilled in Greater Magic, but it was a neccessary one, and many times a day the nursemaid would carry the milk to Amadel in a bottle. The Prince fed himself by magic also, sending spirits into the sea to fetch him fish, to other lands to take grain and wine and meat. He staffed his castle with spirits called up whenever he needed one, none of them with even the continuity of Amadel's nurse, they being made only of air without personality unless he gave it to them, without the power to lift solid things unless he gave it to them, and all of them wont to vanish when he forgot about them. One day, a few years later, the nursemaid didn't return to her human form after a night as a pile of dust, and it was not much of a loss. After that the child was tended by the same airy creatures that maintained everything else.

Throdrexon spent his time in deep melancholy, poring through books in search of vague answers and finding none. He tried to amuse himself in the poetry of others sometimes, and soothe his sorrow by writing some of his own, but he could not. The Muse had left him, and *The Celebration of Hamakara* remained unfinished. He paged wearily through the folios of his own verses written in a happier time, and he hardly recognized them. They were by some stranger whose outlook was entirely different, who lived in a distant world, whose thoughts were not his thoughts. In time, he gave these up and read only the classics.

The future obsessed him. He tried to dwell on the void of the universe, to practice the ways of Honoleth the Wordless as written down by him, but always his meditation was interrupted by thoughts of his own state, and of Iankoros, and his daughter. He was tempted many times to brew a draught of forgetfulness and through it find peace, but he knew better. Nothing would truly change if he did that, and he would face his final battle ignorant, which was not what he wanted.

The most depressing thing of all was the fact that among men there were no prophets. Had there been even one in the remotest corner of the world, Throdrexon would have gone to him, transforming himself into a black bird by night and soaring over the land and sea. But it was written in innumerable places that there were no prophets, and had been none since the battle on the Plain of Leboladen in the earliest days, when the power of men against death had been broken, and the future closed to their eyes. Now there were only petty tricksters

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who spoke vagueness for a penny in all the cities of the world.

It was because of this that Throdrexon turned to the supernatural for aid. He studied the stars for months to find an auspicious night, and when it finally came he was ready. It was in the middle of winter in Amadel's fourth year. He made sure that on that night especially the child was kept occupied by the spirits he had summoned, that they kept her well away from the Tower of Eagles in a distant part of the castle. When all was ready, and the room in which Amadel sat with her ghostly storytellers and musicians carefully charmed against any harm, the Prince went to his study atop the great tower, and turned to a task his hands knew well.

Again he dipped a finger into ash paste and traced a circle on the floor, and within it a star, a triangle and a square, following the faded patterns still remaining. The task seemed like an ancestral memory, something recalled now which had been done by another long ago. It was like walking a familiar way, over a well-worn trail, without thinking.

He wrote in all the names that needed to be written, lit the burners and the torches on the walls. Some of the rare incenses were not to be had, so he made substitutions, but it seemed all right. At last he bolted the door and all the windows save one, then waited for midnight. When the time came he took up a roll of parchment, a list painstakingly compiled over the years by himself and Theremderis before him. It was far inferior to the Scroll of Summoning, but it bore some names and binding and unbinding words, and it was enough.

Once again in the brightly lit room, with the single window open to the darkness, he called out the names listed, and with outstretched arms reached into the outermost abysses in search of a spirit. He felt the familiar cold, so bitter that it burned, and then a tug when he captured his quarry.

A cold wind blew in through the window scattering papers about, extinguishing some of the incense burners and making the torch flames flap raggedly. Throdrexon stood still in the center of the circle, making sure to avoid previous mistakes. He carefully folded up the list and slipped it into an inner pocket, then waited for the spirit to arrive.

It came, and either by accident or some unknown design it was a creature he knew. It was Gladziri.

He spoke the familiar word to bind it to the place, and it remained before him, not moving. The wind died, and he seemed to be alone. But he knew better. He *felt* the presence of the entity, and its power made him tremble. He looked about the room and saw nothing stirring. Incense rose slowly to the ceiling.

Suddenly a mouse ran out from under a bookshelf, across the floor.

"Stop!" Throdrexon spoke the secret name of the mouse tribe. The creature kept going.

"Gladziri! Stop!" He shouted the binding word, and the mouse vanished. The wind came again, and dust stirred. Throdrexon felt a hot blast in the face, as if a distant furnace door had been opened and shut again. Then there was a rustling, like someone walking on fallen leaves, and he sensed clearly the mind of the demon as he had before, but with a difference: the hatred was not as absolute. The contempt was there still, if anything greater, but there was something else. Was it mirth?

The demon spoke in a soft voice, almost like that of a maiden, but it was harsh, and not at all human.

"Very good, little man! You saw my ruse and countered it. I would almost suspect you of intelligence, if such refinements were ever to be found

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among your kind. You are getting better, I'll admit. I ask you for mercy this time. You give me so little peace. Was it not just the other night that you called me?"

"No, it was six years ago."

"Well, it's all the same to me. A night, a year, a millenium, are all the same. We higher beings are not bound by time the way certain vermin are."

"I guess you're no use to me then, since it was time I wanted to ask you about and you seem ignorant of that subject. Alas, I thought you wise."

The demon laughed, and its voice grew deep, thunderous and bold. "Ha! Ha! You try to insult my pride, little man. Again, well done. I had underestimated you, I think, but not by much, for you are as ridiculously unlearned as before. Of course I know of time. We who have intelligence know many things which are hidden to lice, cockroaches, men and beasts of that sort."

Throdrexon remained completely in control, unruffled by the taunts. He had expected such. It was part of the ritual. In fact he was beginning to enjoy the chance to exercise his own wit, but at the same time he remained cautious, lest the creature distract him with the verbal give and take.

"Let us get on to my business," he said. "I want to know the future. You must show me the days ahead, that I might learn from them."

Gladziri's voice was soft again, and scolding like a grandmother. "Oh tush, tush. I am disappointed in you. Why do you bother me for such trifles.? Why not go to one of your witches, hire her to pickle a raven's brain and read the future out of the dirt under your toenails? That is the way they do it these days, isn't it?"

"It seems, O Gladziri, that I was right the first time, and you are truly stupid, for anyone who is at all learned knows that such methods are false, and work only to beguile the simple."

"*Ah! So you are learned then?* Some god has picked his nose and the result is a scholar. Marvelous!"

Throdrexon spoke the word that bound Gladziri yet again, tugging with it as a houndmaster tugs a leash.

"Behold the future then!" gasped the demon, and Throdrexon saw. The smoke from the burners gathered into one place and long, pale hands appeared behind the cloud, holding a black disc the size of a shield. "Look here, and see what is to come!"

The Prince looked, and the disc seemed a window, and he was gazing through it into a vast abyss. There were faint suggestions of shape, then a sea of clouds; and the viewpoint dropped beneath the clouds to reveal stark, barren hillsides and a teaming, populous land that Throdrexon knew.

It was the Underearth. The vision of it lasted but a second, and the eye of the disc descended again down long shafts of stone, and the focus narrowed until there was only blackness again, and in that blackness two yellow eyes opened.

A form stirred and shuffled back from the view, and its face became visible. It was huge, rubbery black, glistening with moisture and had an enormous falt-ended nose and cavernous nostrils. Two dirty white tusks protruded from fleshy jowls.

"Rannon! Is it you?"

"It is I, Throdrexon. Indeed it is I." The voice was a muffled thunderclap, and Throdrexon was too shocked by it to say anything. The god stared upward at him and laughed. "You wonder how I know who you are, don't you? I shall impart a great secret to you then, Throdrexon of Iankoros, whose soul-name is Drothmond, and that is that I know all the names of men, and that is how I own them. I

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know your daughter Amadel and have set a place for her in my kingdom, as I have for you. When you sent the wizard Theremderis to me, I welcomed him as an old friend and escorted him to his new home. *He boils now in a pot of lead, and the fire is fueled with books!* Would you care to see?"

"No! Please!"

"When you come to my land to dwell, you shall see. Come now, if you like . . ."

"I am not ready!"

"But I am."

"I escaped you once." Throdrexon's voice began to break under the strain. His words came out shrill, almost screeching. He was afraid he would faint.

"When you escaped me," continued Rannon, "you handed over all your subjects to me, and for that boon I let you live a while longer. Now Iankoros is *my* land, and I rule there, and I shall take you when I want."

"NO! You do *not*. I command you now, as I have called on you, to tell me what I want to know."

"What do you want to know?"

"My future."

"Oh foolish one, *I* am your future. I am Amadel's future and Theremderis' future, and Hamakara's future unto the ending of time. Did you not know that?"

"Speak not the name of my beloved! You are not worthy, filth!"

"Who? Hamakara? Yes, you did love her, whatever that means. Would you like to be with her again? I can do that for you."

"How? What do you want?"

"Nothing much. I want only that you shall be my slave, and be subject to every whim, as she is now. For remember, O man, *I still have her in my country!*"

"No! You lie! You lie!" screamed the prince.

The god laughed until the tower shook. Throdrexon fell to his knees in the middle of the circle and wept. He covered his face with his hands, and when he dared remove them the black window was gone and Gladziri again invisible.

"Such is your future, little man, told by the one who weaves it. All men can see it if they want to, but they choose otherwise. So, blindly, they walk a series of tangled paths, all of which lead to Rannon. That is all."

"Then life is a meaningless horror," said the prince.

"Not really." Again Gladziri chuckled, and this time it truly hurt. "The comedy of your existence amuses those above you, and for that reason it continues. You provide much merriment for your betters."

"No more! I shall slay myself, and there will be an end to your games."

"You'll kill yourself and go straight to Rannon's lap. Is that what you want?"

"I'll find a way. I'll kill my soul too, so nothing is left."

"That's what Tharalopos did when he eluded Rannon. He blew himself out like the flame of a candle and was no more."

"Begone demon, while I work this thing." Throdrexon spoke the word of Gladziri's unbinding, and yet the demon remained. It rustled back and forth and wheezed. "Begone!"

"No, I shall not leave just yet," said the creature, and it took visible form, a serpent with arms and powerful legs, standing upright. With huge genitalia it wet the line of ash-paste, then smeared it with its foot, and entered the circle.

Throdrexon stared in horror, totally helpless. "What power is this? Begone, I command you, by the names of all my mighty ancestors. Leave this place!"

Even as he said it, he knew that was a futile utterance.

"Forget your ancestors, maggot,"

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said Gladziri, stepping through the triangle and erasing the names written around it. "You have no power now. Your island is dead, slain by you, and without its life you can work no great magic. I came this time because I *chose* to come, because I find you amusing, and am beginning to see what sport Rannon finds in these trifles. I came to tell you that you are ridiculous, and I could have scattered your limbs across the world if I wanted to."

The demon now stood above Throdrexon where he still knelt. The Prince faced it calmly, with complete surrender, and said nothing. They stared at one another in silence for a second, until the foul stream flowed forth again onto the man and he screamed and clawed at his face as it burned him.

"I'm tired of this," said Gladziri, and he left on a wind. Throdrexon writhed on the floor, trying to wipe the thick, putrid, acid-like stuff from him. He tore off his clothing, but it had already burned through. He huddled there, half naked, vomiting, his eyes streaming tears, and he said, "*Why?* Why should I go on?"

And at that moment, again as if by accident or some unknown plan, he heard far away the musicians still playing to Amadel, and he heard her voice, shrieking with laughter at some jest, and he said, "I am answered," just before all consciousness left him.

A while later he awoke, and it was getting light. All burners and torches had gone out, but he needed nothing to know that his face was burned, and his hands, and his chest where Gladziri's water had run down his front. He spoke aloud to no one in a distracted way, saying, "This terror is like a passing dream, and yet it is not a dream for it has not passed, and I have awakened into it."

Again he wept.

Chapter 10: The Flower of Iankoros

TIME SPOKE to the isle of Iankoros in signs and in seasons. Spring came on the heels of a white winter, and summer followed thereafter. Rain came and the wind blew, warm, cold, warm, bitter; constellations wheeled in the clear autumn sky, and Prince Throdrexon watched all these things from his tower with a sense of vague sorrow. He saw deep furrows appear on the slopes of the hills, cut like wrinkles in an old woman's face. He saw debris of ships washed up on the beaches some mornings after storms, and once in a while there was a sail far, far off which would grow large for a while and then shrink away.

Amadel was his chief joy, the only thing that could draw the Prince out of himself for a moment and make him smile, laugh, and be otherwise human. She was a large, beautiful child with a wild riot of curly locks. She had her father's hair and her mother's face, and eyes green as the depths of the ocean. Her disposition, as Throdrexon once put it, was that of a little monkey, but a monkey filled with mirth and charm and occasionally good manners; the kind of monkey that would one day be a great lady, once her tail was gone.

The little girl was not unhappy in those days, for she had been born into a castle filled with spirits, and although the land around it was of grey, sterile ash, her personal universe revolved around her father, who was the source of all wisdom and marvels. She knew nothing else. Once she pointed out a window over the dun-colored hills and asked, "What is that?"

"Why, that is my realm," Throdrexon answered.

"And beyond it?"

"The sea."

"The sea is more beautiful than the

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land, I think," siad Amadel. "What is beyond the sea?"

The Prince stroked his beard, as if thinking deeply.

"A most profound question, young lady. Have you ever seen anything beyond the sea?"

"Sometimes, when I climb high up in the towers and look out on a bright day, I can see something far away, a line at the edge of the sea. What is it?"

"That is more land, my darling. Just more land. You have enough land here, don't you?"

"I like the sea better," said Amadel.

Amadel did prefer the sea, and she played by its shore whenever she could. She collected shells and weeds tossed up by storms, and other strange things deposited nearby. The water with the fish that lived in it and the birds flying above it was a thing of vast wonder, a mystery to be enjoyed. It was much more fun than the stern and silent land.

One of the mysteries of the sea were the ships passing by at a great distance, mere specks on the horizon. She called out to them sometimes, but they went on their way and did not answer. They were like birds in a way, when the birds flew very, very high, beyond the reach of all things, or like spirits racing through the night. And like spirits they vanished after a time; this to Amadel was only natural. She wondered what it would be like, if she could get close enough, to touch one of those ships. Would her hand pass through and cause a stirring, as though she had fanned smoke, or would she find something solid? Which would it be? There was always a certain confusion between solid and ghostly things, between those that faded when no one paid attention to them and those that remained substantial. Amadel had once had the idea that *she* would fade into nothingness in her sleep if no one was there, so for several nights she refused to go to bed unless the bemused Throdrexon stood guard over her. He did, and each morning she would awaken to an empty room and find herself quite solid.

Each time he would explain to her, "I left as soon as you dozed off, and I said no magic over you at all. Still you're here. Isn't that a marvel?"

Then he would laugh, and she would laugh also, and the fear grew smaller and smaller, until it troubled her no more. Real people she learned, did not need the attention of others to keep their existence. Only she and her father were real then, along with the sea birds and the pigeons, if they could be counted as people.

QUESTIONS CONTINUED, and Throdrexon answered them. One day he walked with his daughter in the courtyard below the Tower of Eagles, and they came to something round and white and hollow. Amadel was not afraid of the thing, bent to touch it, and then for some reason did not. She had seen the object before many times, but had never asked about it. It was somehow unpleasant. Around it were other white things of various shapes and sizes.

"Father? What are these?"

"Bones, child. Just bones."

"Whose bones?"

"I don't know. Perhaps they are the bones of Iankoros itself."

This puzzled Amadel. She stared at the heap, and asked again. "How did they get here?"

"Perhaps they fell out of the sky," said Throdrexon. There was a touch of irritation in his voice. "Perhaps they've been here forever."

"Which was it?"

"How should I know? I didn't see them fall, and I haven't been here forever."

"You mean you *don't know?*"

"No. I mean, yes. That's it. I don't know." He didn't want to talk about it

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anymore. He took the child by the hand and dragged her away.

THIS WAS the great dilemma of Throdrexon's fatherhood. He had kept so much from his daughter, hidden so many things she would have to discover eventually. He had always avoided the matter of her mother, never explained his occasional slips of the tongue, the references Amadel encountered in songs and in stories. When she grew a little older, the contradictions would become ludicrous, unmaintainable. The girl would have to know that people have two parents. She would sooner or later figure out that there were lands beyond the sea more populous than this one. Throdrexon had worked out countless schemes of interconnecting lies, self-consistent falsifications to hide the truth that pained him like an old wound. Yet the lies hurt also, the realization that he would have to keep telling them to his Amadel, and one day she would see through them and then would think little good of him. That, he would be unable to bear, and he knew it. He tried to tell himself that truth was itself a thing worth striving for, and that to deny it altogether was to make life not worth living. But he knew that he couldn't face telling her now, because what he really feared was the loss of his Amadel to the lures of the world. Without her he would be destitute; he would break loose and drift; he would sink forever into the pain of his guilt and his dark memories.

So to delay the inevitable, to keep Amadel happy and unconcerned, he strove to create diversions for her. He brought her a playmate out of the vast deep of night, a cloud, a phantasm summoned with a word and given shape and duration. He sent it to her, and that was how Amadel came one day to the open space behind the castle's armory and gasped at the sight of wondrous blue flowers growing thick out of the pavement, climbing up the stone walls and over the edge. She looked on in amazement, and a boy sat up in the midst of them and said, "Do you like my flowers?"

"They're beautiful!"

"Pick one." She did, and it was solid in her hand, like dried sea-kelp only soft. She looked at the boy then, and realized that he, too, was not like most spirits, not a dull illusion. Perhaps he wasn't a spirit at all, but another real person, like her father and herself. The prospect was exciting. She had never learned to fear strangers, having never encountered one before.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"My name is Master Windywisp. I can do magic."

This didn't impress her very much. "My father does magic, too."

"Well, watch this!" The other clapped his hands — the sound was solid enough — and each of the blue flowers sprouted from its blossom a new stalk and a red flower on the end of the same size, causing the top-heavy plants to sway and bend over.

"How do you like that?"

"Can you do more?"

"Yes!" He clapped again, and the red flowers gave forth orange ones, and the orange birthed a brook of velvet, from which sprang gold, pink, and green. The long chains of them covered the walls now, and lay on the ground in heaps.

"What else can you do?" asked Amadel.

"Many things. I can sing songs. Would you like a song?"

"Yes, a merry one."

"A merry song indeed," said he, and he sang one in a high, sweet voice:

"Oh, a wizard there was who lived
in the air,
Yes he lived up in the air!
And he had a wife, whose temper

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was rife,
And she scared all the spirits up there,
Oh! She scared all the spirits up there.

This wizard he hid himself under the ground,
Yes he hid under the ground!
But alas his dear wife, she also came down,
And she chased him round and round,
Oh! She chased him round and round.

This wizard he turned himself into a toad,
An ugly old horny old toad!
But his ugly old wife, became a toad too,
Said "I'll never let go of you,
Oh! I'll never let go of you!"

The song disturbed Amadel. Throdrexon had bestowed it on the spirit out of his own memory, as something he had learned long ago, a light, funny lyric and nothing more. But to Amadel, who wasn't sure what a wife was, and didn't understand why a husband should want to run away from one, it had layer upon layer of hidden meanings. It was a new thing, and it frightened her.

"Didn't you like it? Wasn't it merry enough?" asked Windywisp, when Amadel did not smile.

"It was all right."

"But not overwhelmingly merry, I see. Well! I'll have to come up with a better one later. In the meantime, look behind you."

She turned, and her mouth drew into a wide, soundless O. There, before her, knee-deep in the flowers, stood a winged unicorn, tall, thin, and graceful, with a delicate, silky white mane and a silver horn. Its pink feathered wings unfolded and flapped, spreading wider than the length of its body.

"This is Master Star," said Windywisp. The unicorn neighed. "He likes you."

"I like him," said Amadel.

"Climb up on his back."

She tried, but it was too high. The taller boy lifted her, then mounted the beast behind her. He placed an arm around her and with the other hand held tightly to the animal's mane. "Up!" he cried, and suddenly there appeared before them a long arching road of red marble, leading over the walls and towers of the castle, over the dull landscape of Iankoros, into the sky. Master Star galloped along, flapping his wings lightly as he did. Sparks flew from silver hooves, as finally the road came to an end and the unicorn leapt off into free space. Wings caught the wind, and slowly, like a migrating swan, the steed rose higher yet into the air, the pink feathers hiding the land below, then revealing, then hiding, like windows alternately opening and closing shut. Amadel looked down and caught glimpses of the blue sea stretching far, the isle of Iankoros like a dull brown patch, and beyond it to the west the mainland of Amyrthel with all its green forests and living prairies.

Chill air blew past them. Amadel had to shout to be heard.

"Why is the land a different color?"

"Because it's not your land. It's different." The boy's voice could just barely be heard, trailing off behind.

"Just different."

"Can I go there some day?"

"Maybe sometime. Look!"

She looked, and between the rising and falling of the wings she saw the whole Earth spread out below her, the sun low in the sky off to the west, sinking into the fire beyond the edge of the world. Iankoros was but a tiny dot, and all the lands seemed tiny, the sea bounding them on all sides. She saw the south and a vast land there as

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barren as her own. She did not know its name but it was the Great Stone Waste, known to mariners but never explored, empty, lifeless, stretching unto the end of the earth. South of the world beyond the Waste there was only air. To the east there was water, where the oceans ran out past Elimdorath and the last isles, and to the north only ice and mist, the land of Rannon. Had she known what this all meant, had she recognized the clear view of the four directions with their attendant humours, the four elements that make up creation clearly displayed with all the continents made visible at once to the eye, she would have been the wisest of the wise, the most learned of all philosophers. But to her this vision of the scheme of things was only a glory glimpsed in a dream, and she knew only the joy of beholding it. She rose higher yet, and saw the moon as it prepared to rise out of the east, saw the comets close up like ships passing in the night, and heard the songs that pass among the stars, and then, at last, Master Star began to descend.

When he passed below the height of the sun it was evening. The sky remained dark, the shining moon now like a shield or a lantern in the purple sky. The lands were hidden from her and the sea was in shadow by the time they reached the marble road, the constellation of Panlath's Bowmen standing guard over the horizon.

It was strange to have something solid underfoot again. The unicorn folded its tired wings to its sides and galloped swiftly down the marble roadway, sending sparks off into the darkness. Again they came to the castle towers and walls, and to the yard where the flowers had been. Only bare stones were there now.

"I want to do it again," said Amadel, as Windywisp helped her down. "Soon! Can we?"

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"I think so, but not right away."

"Why?"

"There are so many other things to do."

"But I *want* to!" Amadel pouted.

"Now, don't be like that. Look, there's your father coming."

Amadel looked, and as soon as she turned, the boy, the unicorn, and the red marble bridge into the sky, vanished. Throdrexon was indeed coming toward her, arms outspread.

"Well, well, where have you been my little one?" He picked her up, grunting a little with her weight. "You know, you're getting heavy." He tweaked her nose fondly.

"I've been up in the sky."

"Oh? What did you see up there?"

"I saw the moon close up, and the stars, and down there was the ocean, and other lands, lots of them. I want to go visit them sometime."

"Would that be proper, young lady? You, a princess, visiting all those countries? Wouldn't it be better to wait and let the world come to you?"

"Are there people in those places that would come?"

"Yes, there are." He saw how her face grew puzzled, then grave when he said that. Amadel was thinking, wondering about those other lands. Throdrexon wished he had not shown them to her, wished he had not said what he had, but there was no way out. Could he deny the air? It was inevitable. The seeds of discontent were sown.

Chapter 11: Opening Doors

WHEN THRODREXON'S daughter was eight she asked to be taught to read, and he taught her. He had feared this thing, delaying it as long as he could, but when the time actually came and Amadel brought him a book, piping cheerfully, "Show me how to read this, Father!" he could not refuse. He could not keep his beloved one's mind shut in like a caged bird, never able to stretch its wings and fly. Still, he was afraid, for he knew that one day Amadel would be a woman — her mind was very sharp — and she would see through all he had done. On that day, how would she regard him? With love? With horror? Or with pity?

He stood silently when the request was made, and the child tugged on his sleeve and said again, "I am very smart. I learned the songs you taught me very quickly. I can learn to read, too."

"Yes, you can," said Throdrexon and he took the book from her. He recognized the volume as something he had read once, very long ago. It was a thick thing, bound in hide, bestudded with jewels, and locked shut with an iron hasp. He carried the book over to a table, laid it down, and pulled up a chair. Amadel dragged a high stool from a corner and perched beside him. He ran his hand slowly over the book's cover, wiping the dust off, and as he did an image came into his mind, a white-bearded face, the face of Theremderis, who had once sat thus with another child, much younger, who struggled with the magic of letters. Something deep in Throdrexon's mind slammed the shutters against the vision before there could be recognition. He pondered.

"Father?"

"Yes?" He was again aware of the world around him. He looked down at the book and said, "I'll teach you. Don't worry."

"I can't get the lock off."

"Well let me look at it." He noticed then for the first time the tiny padlock, no larger than his thumbnail, which guarded the hasp of the book. He remembered then who had put that lock there, and how, and what it was for. It was fitting that Amadel should

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have brought him this book. Perhaps it was in the design of Gthalmis the Crafty, who was said to have spent all his life fashioning this lock and this book.

"How does it open?"

"A key must be turned three times."

"What key? Do you have the key, Father?"

"No, little one. You do."

"But I don't!"

"You are the key, Daughter." With that he stared intently into her face, and her eyes grew wide and frightened. He pointed to the keyhole and said, "Go inside," and suddenly she was falling and the hole was a dark cavern waiting to engulf her.

SHE CAME to rest with a bump, as if she had toppled from her stool. She found herself in complete darkness, on a cold, smooth floor that felt like metal, not the stone of the castle. She stood up, feeling the hard chill through her thin slippers. She reached around in the dark and touched nothing.

"Hello! Hello!" Her voice echoed back and forth in the stale air, from great distances. She was in a large hall, it seemed. She tried not be be afraid, but was. Wouldn't her father protect her here? Hadn't he sent her by his magic? He would be with her. He *would*.

She groped again in the blackness and walked forward, slowly with buckling knees, afraid that at any minute she would fall down an unseen hole. But she didn't. She found a wall and hugged it with relief, breathing heavily. Then after a minute she continued to walk, feeling her way along the wall, in hopes that it would lead her somewhere. The wall seemed to be curving, but she was not sure. There was no point of reference.

Her eyes began to play tricks on her in the complete absence of light. She saw spots like after-images, blue and red, pulsating as they drifted to one side or the other and faded. It was if she had closed her lids and pressed her fingers against them, creating that sort of distorted ghost-shape.

She felt her face, to make sure that her eyes were indeed still open. They were, but she could not see her hand before her.

When she finally saw a light ahead she thought it was also unreal, but it did not drift or fade. It grew brighter, from a tiny point to a warm glow, and when she was very near she knew that it was a true light. She saw it to be a lantern held by a bent figure in a hooded cape.

"Hello! Help me! I'm lost!" The lantern-bearer turned at the sound of her voice, but did not speak. She couldn't see his face.

"What place is this?" she asked. "Can you help me get out?"

Still he did not answer, and she approached him cautiously. She saw that he was real, that the light didn't shine dimly through him as it did with spirits.

"Father? Is that you?"

The lantern was held higher, a word whispered, and the light grew brighter. Still Amadel could discern no face beneath the hood, but she could tell that she stood in a round chamber — she didn't know how high it was, the roof lost in gloom above — into which ran four passageways, their openings gaping like bottomless mouths in the half-shadow. She had emerged from one of them, but she didn't know which.

"Who are you?" The lantern-bearer asked in a voice tolling like a distant bell. Most certainly this one was *not* her father.

"I am Amadel," she said, defensively.

"Go that way." He pointed to one of the tunnels.

She went a few steps, reluctant to

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return to the total darkness, and turned.

"Will you go with me?"

In reply the light winked out and the other was gone.

Carefully, uncertainly, Amadel walked in what she hoped was a straight line, arms outstretched before her until again she touched a wall, and a sharp corner. It was an opening to one of the passageways. She had found it, and breathed a sigh of relief. She tried not to think that it might be the wrong one. She was very close to panic now.

Her light, shuffling footsteps echoed in the empty silence, and the sound of them came back only after a long while. She continued on, one hand touching the side of the corridor, the floor frigid beneath her, and she wondered what this all meant. She remembered the book, the keyhole, and her father's strange words. She didn't understand.

Finally, after what might have been hours in the timeless dark, she banged without warning into something hard and hurt her nose. The echoes had been different for a while by then, returning quickly, sometimes sounding like they came from behind her.

It was the end of the tunnel, and there was no door in it. She ran her hands over the entire surface from the floor to as high as she could reach, and went sideways, until she came to the other wall. Nothing. A dead end. She must have gone down the wrong tunnel. She would have to go back and find the right one. Again, fear arose in her, but she held it back. A mistake and nothing more. Why had the man turned out the light so quickly, before she reached the right opening?

All the way back she wondered. She walked more quickly this time, along the same wall she had followed before knowing, at least, that the way was safe. Still, it was a long walk, and by the time she got to the opening, her legs were tired and her feet sore.

The hooded man was there again with his light.

"Hello! Help me again. I went down the wrong one."

"Who are you?" The voice was once more booming and hollow.

"Why, I am Amadel."

He pointed to the passage from which she had just emerged.

"No, that's the wrong one. It doesn't lead anywhere."

"Who are you?"

"I am a princess, the princess of Iankoros, the greatest princess in the world. Listen you, show me the way out or I'll —"

"Go that way." Again the finger pointed, to a different tunnel this time.

"Hold the light until I get there at least. This I command you. I am a princess, you know."

The man spoke no more, but accompanied her to the tunnel mouth. Then he vanished before her, and she was again alone in the darkness.

"Hey! Where are you?" She flailed her arms around, touching only the cold, musty air. When she was sure he was not nearby, she entered the tunnel, found the side of it, and proceeded.

It seemed that this one stretched much farther than the previous one had, and Amadel grew weary, but she did not dare sit down and rest. She feared she might fall asleep, and anything could creep upon her in this dark.

What was this all about? One minute she had been with her father in a familiar room, and then — this. Had a more powerful wizard snatched her away while her father was distracted with opening the book? Was that possible? Could someone do that in Throdrexon's own castle?

No. It was not possible. That was

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not the explanation.

The walls began to grow closer together. Perhaps it was the closeness of the air, perhaps some kind of instinct, but as she held onto the side of the passageway with her right hand, something made her reach out with her left. She hit something solid, invisible. Another wall. A while later she felt yet another wall above her, pressing down on her head. The ceiling. She walked bent over, and the tunnel closed in from all sides even more. She crawled, and it seemed that the floor rose slightly to meet the walls and ceiling in some distant point.

She wanted out, blindly, like a trapped thing, she wanted out. She pressed on, never thinking of going back, back into the darkness of the wide chamber. This way, perhaps, if she burrowed like a mole in the earth of steel, she might, just *might*, come into the light and warmth of the world again.

It was hard to breathe. The air was heavy, the darkness a living, throbbing thing. When she could no longer crawl on her hands and knees she crawled on her belly, worming her way along, her arms out in front, the way too narrow for her to bring them back. The corners of the walls and floor had vanished, and the way was round, like a constricting tube, about to be pinched off. Yet some impossible, irrational urge drove her on, the urge to escape by some feat of striving and fury, to break out, to seek the light.

It was only when she tried to take a deep breath and couldn't, and found the tunnel pressing tight against her ribs, against her shoulders, and when she moved her head just a little bit and struck hard metal, that she stopped, and realized the horror of the situation, and could not even scream. She let out a long, whining, sobbing moan, and tried to back out.

Tried, but was stuck. She could not move her arms back to push — her elbows hit the walls — and there was only smooth metal for her feet to kick against.

"Oh, help me. Father, help me . . ."

She began to cry and sweat, and slowly, she did manage to move a little, pushing back a few inches with her hands, a few more, until she had enough room to bend her arms more freely, and still the enormous weight of the tunnel pressed down upon her. She began to crawl backwards, to scream wildly, inarticulately, without even syllables, and her cries gurgled back and forth between mocking echoes.

She moved backwards, ever backwards, until she found she could turn around, then crawled some more, bruising hands and knees and elbows, facing the darkness ahead, leaving the more solid darkness behind. At last she came to the end of the tunnel, half stumbling, half crawling, afraid to stand upright and run, shrieking her father's name — he did not come — until she saw the light of the lantern floating in space before her, and grasping the lantern-bearer as if he were a post and she drowning, she sobbed over and over again, "Father, Father, help me."

And the man replied in his stern, stony voice: *"Who are you?"*

"I — I am my father's daughter. He is Prince Throdrexon of Iankoros. Oh, I don't want to be away from him. Take me to him! He'll give you gold!"

The stranger's voice was softer. "Come with me, then." He took her by the hand and led her to the only opening she had not tried, and when they drew near she saw by the light of the lantern that it was not a tunnel mouth at all, but a door. The man stopped before it, took a silver key from his pocket, a key that glowed as if with its own light in the semidarkness, and he opened the door. There was a creak, and then a burst of light

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like a thousand million suns.

AMADEL AWOKE on the floor by the table. Her father still sat there, above her, with the book before him.

"Father!" She jumped up, threw her arms around him and wept. "I'm so glad to be back. How did it happen? What was it?"

"Look." He showed her the book. The lock open beside it. "You have opened it. Do you want to read now?"

"No, no, not now. I only want to be with you."

So they did not read that day, and Amadel stayed closer to her father than ever, but within her there was a doubt, a doubt of his infinite power. He had not rescued her. Perhaps he could not have done so. This thing did not occur to Throdrexon, and he never knew that his strategem had had a double effect. It was true that his daughter was more dependent on him than ever — that was his intent — but also her faith was shaken, and for the first time, she had the capacity to look for another pillar, another person to guard her.

Perhaps that had been the plan of Glthamis the Crafty.

A week later they sat in the same room at the same table, and Amadel nudged the book over to her father.

"Show me," she said.

"Now? You wish to read?"

"I do."

"This is a great magic. Nothing is more powerful than words."

"I want to learn," she said.

"Very well then," said Throdrexon. "Pick out the story you want to read." He gave her the book and watched intently as she turned the pages in heavy handfuls, for he knew there would be great significance in the story she chose. Such was the design of the book. Much could be read in it, not only the text of the story but, if one were astute enough, the innermost nature of the one who selected it. Therefore, the prince smiled when he saw that his daughter had stopped at *The Story of the Phoenix*. He recognized the illustration even before she gave the book back to him, a picture of a huge golden bird chained atop a rock, conversing with a man while two dark spirits converged in the background. This time the meaning seemed easy to see. The Phoenix had been from the earliest times the emblem of the princes of Iankoros, and Amadel, heir to a prince, had chosen her dynasty and her realm. She had chosen well.

The girl looked at the picture for a long time, then asked, "What's the story about?"

"The bird Phoenix," said Throdrexon. "You have seen its image everywhere, but now you shall know its tale. Would you like to read it?"

"Yes, but it'll take years!"

"No it won't. You'll learn faster than that; first the outline of the tale, then the words that make it up. First then, the outline. This is the tale of our first ancestor, Manahotain the Great, the mightiest of all men. He fought beside the gods against the Unliving and against the renegade Rannon in the earliest days, and he was at the battle on the plain of Leboladen when all the gods fell before the sword of the Great Dark. Yet he held back Death that day, and through his strivings the world was saved, but only at great cost. The great cost is the eternal vigilance of men, who must stand alone against Rannon and the shadows. This story tells how Manahotain rescued the world one time, when the gods came not to his aid."

"Why didn't they come?" asked Amadel.

"Because they were dead, having been slain at Leboladen. Haven't you been paying attention?"

"Yes, but I didn't know if this was after that."

"It was, and then Manahotain stood

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against all evil with no help at all. It was a year when spring didn't come; when the snows of winter continued to pile up and never melted, when rivers remained frozen and mountains of ice wandered into the southern oceans. Crops could not be planted and ships could not sail. Wise men conferred over the problem, and in the end they knew that the Phoenix had not come that year to fly over the Earth and bring springtime, to hang high in the sky and send summer, to burn itself to ashes and be reflected in the redness of the leaves."

"It burns up?"

"Yes, and in ashes it lies all the winter long, in a kind of death, but in the earliest month of spring the ashes stir and a white worm emerges, and the worm devours the ashes and grows into the Phoenix, and flies off into the sky to begin the year again. But in this particular year the Phoenix did not come, so the wise men of the world sent Manhotain to find it, to bring it back so that summer would be restored.

"And he went. First he climbed up into the sky on the bridge of the rainbow, and he travelled beyond the sun until he came to the spaces that are always dark, and there he spoke to the stars asking, 'Have you seen the Phoenix?' And the stars answered, 'When one of our number burns out and falls we care not, so how could we have seen the Phoenix?' They laughed at him, and he felt the cold chill of the starwinds.

"Next he went down to the Earth again and sailed over the sea in a boat, carefully avoiding the ice floes and floating mountains, until he came to the southernmost land, the Great Stone Waste. There he made his way to the edge of the world, where the stone drops off into the abyss, and in the abyss he saw the serpent Shamath, who races forever around the rim of the world, chasing the

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golden rattles on his own tail. And Manahotain asked him, 'Where is the Phoenix? Have you seen the Phoenix?' And the serpent answered, 'I see only the golden treasures before me, yet I cannot reach it. When I go quickly it goes quickly; when I slow to rest, it slows also to mock me. I care for nothing but this. No, I have not seen the Phoenix. But if you help me capture the gold, I'll search for the Phoenix for you, out of gratitude.' The man refused this offer, because he knew that if the serpent ever stopped racing around the world the lands and seas would no longer be bounded and all things would slip off into the abyss. And he knew also that Shamath wanted only gold, and knew nothing of gratitude.

"So finally, Manahotain the Brave descended alone into the greatest darkness of all. Perhaps it was a cave, perhaps the Underearth, or even a dream, a corner of his own mind, but he descended nevertheless until there was no light at all, and there he found the bird Phoenix, bound to a rock, and before it the two spirits Darkness and Cold stood guard. He said to them, 'I command you to release the Phoenix,' and they replied, 'We will not, for he is ours.' And Manahotain cast against them a mighty word, and Darkness and Cold trembled, but ultimately they spoke another word, and bound the first. And so the man called up another word, more powerful than the first, the word that is the true name of fire and light, but they bound that also. And when he saw that this would not work, he said to the spirits, 'Will you answer a riddle?' 'We will,' was the reply. So he asked them a riddle, cleverly composed, each word of it placed for its power, and in that riddle were the true names of the Earth and of Man, of Manahotain and all the inhabited lands, and of all the lesser gods that still thrive upon the Earth. All these things he blended into his riddle, though he knew they would all be lost if the riddle was expounded. He took this great risk because he was Manahotain, possesor of a wit more subtle than any other, and in the end he was justified, for Darkness and Cold indeed could *not* answer him, and were thus vanquished. Then he took his sword Dran — the same Dran I own now — and cut the bonds of the Phoenix, and the bird said to him, 'If I come back into the world now, will men honor me?' 'I am a man,' answered the hero, and that was enough. The Phoenix reached out with its beak to its own wing and plucked out a feather and gave that feather to Manahotain saying, 'Know always my favor.' Then the Phoenix flew up into the world and the snows melted and summer returned."

"That's all the story?" asked Amadel.

"Yes, that's all of it, and now that you know it you will learn to read it by studying each word and each line, until they are clear to you."

"Is there nothing more to the story at all?"

"No there isn't. I told you that before."

"Well what happened to the feather? Didn't he keep it?"

"Of course he kept it, but when he died the feather became — not quite real anymore, like a spirit, and it appears to the Princes of Iankoros on occasion to inspire them, or to remind them in times of trouble that the favor of the Phoenix is still with them."

"Have you ever seen it?"

"Yes." He was beginning to grow exasperated. "Of course I have."

"Oh." Somehow she didn't quite believe him.

Chapter 12: The Other

STILL MORE years passed. More fruitless springtimes came and went; and Amadel grew. And as she grew,

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she grew alone, apart with her books, away from the father she rarely saw. Throdrexon had undertaken a study of the stars, and now he slept by day. He could be seen late at night gazing up from the window of his tower, or from the castle walls. When he wasn't there he was locked in a room somewhere filled with must and silence, poring over volumes of obscure lore. He confided to his daughter once that the Earth itself was but a speck of dust on the great eye of eternity, and in a blink it would be gone. It was of no interest. Only the skies, the unchanging courses of the planets, the stars in their houses were worthy of his attention.

So it was that Amadel wandered over the hills of Iankoros by herself. Shadowed halls were not for her. She wanted to be out under the sky by the shore of the sea, and she took her books with her out of doors. She read them as she walked, sometimes stopping to scan a page intently before moving on, sometimes sitting in the same spot all day while a particular tale enthralled her. She spent much time at the top of the Black Cliffs, never once suspecting what they once had meant. She liked it there because on clear days, if she looked west and strained her eyes, she could make out the dim coastline, the mainland. She would sometimes just sit and wonder at those places beyond the water, while the sea birds wheeled and cried all around her. She envied the birds, wishing that she too had wings to bear her off to unknown places, to new lands.

She grew up with books as her only companions, and they were good friends to her. They taught her much. First she read *The Story of the Phoenix* in its entirety, then the other tales in that same volume, and she marvelled at them, for they were indeed splendid. Afterwards, she turned to the romances and discovered the complex glories of *Valan and Ishurti*, the greatest love story of all. She learned from it what love was, how incomprehensible and feverish a thing it could be, and what it was like to go on a long quest over mountains and deserts for something you dearly wanted, how soul-wearying even that quest could become, and how exciting. She learned also, almost profoundly, the sorrow and terror of death when she shared Ishurti's last moments huddled in the arms of her already dead lover, in the glade of Hardath Ethor, with the wintry wind blowing through the ice-laden trees, and the night owls screeching. It was more than an abstraction.

Also, the tale told her of the world beyond the ocean, and she studied it for details ignored by most readers, for its flavors and textures. She found endless delight in the description of the meadow in chapter three, where the hero first comes upon his beloved. To Amadel the idea of a land covered with green living things not conjured by illusion was more lovely than any dream or fancy. And incredible was the tournament scene with its impossible, bustling crowds, with thousands of spectators who cheered while the knights crashed against one another and maidens looked on. The roar of that scene, the sights, the smells, all recorded in vivid detail, were a heady mixture. There were so many faces. How could anyone know that many faces? How could there be so many people in all the world, let alone in one place, and how would each know what was required of him?

She learned much about Iankoros from *Valan and Ishurti* also, even though it is never mentioned. She read the descriptions of towns, many houses clustered together around streets, and she looked on one of the ruins she had grown accustomed to in a new way. All these windowless, roofless buildings which once had

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been left to the wind and the rain these fifteen years, were a town, or once had been, presumably with people living in them, but the people were all gone now. Throdrexon would never tell her a word about the island's past. If she brought up the subject he grew angry and left the room, or merely said, "It is as it always was and always shall be." With the reading of *Valan and Ishurti*, mystery was added.

Again she looked into that book and into the book of tales. She read of Valan's voyage to Nradius, and King Thillamdel's vain search for Elimdorath, the land of lost youth. From these she learned what ships were, wooden houses with sails, not tiny white specks seen from afar. She wondered if the people of Iankoros had not left on ships, but then she went down to the harbor and saw the rotted, sagging quays, and masts sticking up out of the water. Those were the remains of ships, and no one had gone anywhere in them.

Another important idea come to Amadel from the minor, fragmentary narrative of *The Bird-Summoned One*, in which the heroine is imprisoned atop a mountain, and knowing the speech of the birds, she is able to tell them of her plight and thus send for the hero. Amadel thought about this, and watching the gulls as they swooped low over the waves to snatch a fish, and as they nested among the rocks of the Black Cliffs, and it became very clear to her. She didn't need rescue but she did want to communicate with other lands. So she went to her father, and asked him the secret of the tongue of the birds.

He sat in his study atop the Tower of Eagles in the light of tapers, with the shutters closed. He was pale, thin-faced and beginning to grey. He hardly recognized his daughter at first, and to her he was a dim shape in the gloom, until her eyes adjusted.

"Father," she said. "You are a very great magician, perhaps the greatest in all the world. Surely you know how to speak to things that aren't men, like animals and birds."

He snorted. It wasn't a laugh, just a snort.

"I *am* the greatest magician in the world, and I have done deeds that would drive you mad, little one, if I were to tell you of them. And from these great deeds I have gained wisdom, and from my wisdom I know that nothing matters, not magic, not deeds, not even love. What does it concern the universe if one human loves another, when they'll both be gone so soon. Has that brief moment any significance?"

She stuck to her intent.

"Father, can you do it? Can you talk to the birds?"

"Harumph!" Another snort. "Why should I bother. That's the simplest form of magic. Any warlock's babe or village witch can do that. If you want a sick cow cured, call a witch. If you want to talk to sparrows, call a witch."

"But there aren't any witches here, even if there are villages. Or were."

He was suddenly alert. "What do you mean by that?"

"Those empty houses all together. They must have been a village once."

"Well, don't pay any attention to them. They've always been empty. They're no one's problem now." He saw that it would be best to draw her away from this. He went on, "Yes, I'll teach you how to speak to the birds, for all the good you'll get from it."

The bird language was indeed simple, and he taught it to her in a week, with one lesson each day of no more than an hour. Then he withdrew again and left her to make what she would of her new knowledge.

She came to the Black Cliffs one evening as the sun was nearly set, and watched as the Amyrthelian coastline faded into the purpling west. When it

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was gone, she called out to the birds of the air. She called them to herself from out of the sky, from off the sheer cliffs, hailing them with the word used by one of their number to locate the rest in the darkness of night or fog, or simply over a distance. They came to her and flocked all around her, fearing this human not at all. Gladly they accepted the offerings she gave them, the heads of fish, scraps from the dinner table. After they had eaten she questioned them, saying, "Tell me, friends, of the land beyond the sea."

"It is far away," they answered, "and a flight there is very tiring unless you can find a rising current. Then you can glide all the way."

"But what of that land? What of its people? Tell me of its cities, and of the great ships that sail between its ports."

Many voices squawked at once:

"Wide land. Goes on forever. Don't like to go far from sea.

"There's a big river. You can go up the river.

"The ships! Oh the ships! If you're very tired, and the wind won't carry you, sometimes you can find a ship and rest on its masts, and the ship will take you where you're going. That's what ships are for.

"Sometimes the sailors chase you away.

"Or try to eat you.

"A curse on men who try to eat you!"

"Please! Please!" cried Amadel, exasperated. "I don't care about those things. Tell me about the people of that land, and what they do."

"What they do? What they do?

"There is a big dock in the city by the river, by the big river, and there is a man who comes there every morning, a big man with a wobbly round face, who comes to throw parts of his fish into the water — the best parts, and we all swarm around him, and the eating is good.

"Sometimes he doesn't come. Sometimes a little man does.

"A boy.

"And all through the city there are places where the eating is very good. Humans are so wasteful. They throw away such delicious entrails!"

"But I don't want to hear about fish guts!" the girl shouted. "I want to hear of kings and heroes and adventures."

"Who cares about those? You can't eat them," said the birds, and Amadel saw that it was hopeless. She thanked the birds and dismissed them, and returned to her books. She read how sometimes a hero would wander into remote lands — what land was more remote than this?— and find a forlorn maiden in some desolate place, then take her back home to his city. She waited and waited, hoping that she would be that maiden. She was not forlorn really, just eager to see what lay beyond the horizon, and with the barren land of Iankoros she was becoming increasingly bored.

Sometimes she saw the sails of ships far off, but they moved away and vanished every time. And no one came for her.

THERE WAS a storm one midsummer night, and from a high window Amadel watched all the elements tear at one another. She saw the stark landscape of the island instantly revealed in a flash of lightning, then sheathed again in darkness. She saw legions of ridge-like, white-capped waves march upon the land, only to crash against the stones in a chaos of foam. Even far away she could hear their booming. She sat up all night alone and never saw her father or any of his wraiths, and she fell asleep early in the morning hours with her head on the windowsill, the rain in her hair.

Some hours later she awoke. The sky was grey above her. The storm had abated, and the darkest clouds, ragged with trailing streamers, were

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beginning to scatter against the high and paler overcast. She went to the kitchen, where there was food prepared always, but no one to prepare it, and she breakfasted in silence. Then she rushed out into the muddy world, pulled up her skirt, and waded barefoot across the drenched land, often sinking to her knees, until she came to the shore where the sand and the rocks were as they always were.

To Amadel each new storm was a treat, for afterwards there would be strange things washed up on the beaches, novelties from beyond the sea. They broke the monotony and sometimes gave tantalizing hints of what lay beyond. This time something truly extraordinary was deposited for her examination: it was a wreck.

A great vessel had been cast upon the rocks a ways out from the narrow beach. Those rocks were treacherous, underwater at high tide, and they could rip the bottom out of a ship. Iankoros was known the world over for its difficult coastline, and yet another craft had fallen prey to it. The ship lay on its side, awash in the receding tide, its hull cracked nearly in half and flattened, like a partially crushed egg. Both masts had snapped away, and along the beach were strewn bits of wreckage.

Amadel climbed eagerly down to the beach, excited by this tremendous find. It was as if the entire distant world had been thrown upon her shore all at once. First she came to some spars, a tangle of rigging, and a splintered cask, then a man lying face down in the water. At the sight of the corpse she paused uneasily, not quite afraid, but the joy of the event was taken away. She found more debris, sometimes whole sections of deck or hull, and more drowned sailors. Some of them were horribly mangled, with crushed heads and limbs bent in odd ways. Some of them were bloated and stared up at her with pale, bulging faces.

She stepped wide around them and still looked for strange treasures from distant lands. She saw a trunk, apparently whole, bobbing up and down a few feet out from the water's edge. She waded to get it, lost hold of her skirt, tripped and got thoroughly wet, caught hold of one of the trunk's handles, and dragged it onto the beach. She was still trying to figure out how to open it when she heard someone cough.

She stopped, frozen. She looked around.

"Who is there?"

Another cough. One of the limp figures moved slightly. "Help me," came a feeble voice.

Amadel lost all interest in the trunk and ran to where the stranger lay, face up in the water, gasping and sputtering as the surf washed over him. He was entangled in rigging and still clinging to a piece of a mast. He was a boy, her own age or younger, thin, deathly pale, with a look of infinite exhaustion on his face.

Amadel's heart beat wildly. She was actually, for the first time in her life, in the presence of someone from beyond Iankoros. If he should die — no! He would not die!

She fumbled excitedly with the ropes until she got him free. She pulled him onto the sand and set him down. Weakly, shaking all over, he got up on his hands and knees and vomited seawater. Then he fell down and lay still, seemingly oblivious of the expectant girl who stood over him.

She didn't know what to say. At last she managed, "Are you — all right?"

He rolled over and looked up at her, too tired to be surprised. "Yes, yes."

"Can I do anything?" She was unfamiliar with the arts of rescue.

"Have you any water? Water." His voice was a hoarse gasp.

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"There's a spring in a cave nearby. Can you walk, or should I fetch it for you?"

The boy lurched to his feet, and Amadel caught him under the arm as he nearly fell over again. He staggered and leaned on her as they traveled along the beach, and wearily he looked up at the naked cliffs, the lifeless hills and the heavy grey sky.

"What a dreary place. What land is this anyhow? Last night in the storm we didn't know where we were. We saw the cliffs and were afraid it might be Iankoros."

"This is Iankoros," said Amadel.

At that the boy let out a cry of horror. He pulled away from Amadel and ran a short distance, then stopped, barely able to stand.

"I am dead like the rest only worse," he said with resignation. "Dead though I live. How lucky the drowned are."

"What are you talking about? You're alive."

"This is Iankoros, isn't it? Doesn't Throdrexon live here?"

"He does, and I am his daughter."

"What? Throdrexon, the mad wizard of Iankoros, has a daughter?"

She stepped toward him. He didn't retreat any further. "He's not mad," she said. "He's the greatest magician in the world, and a Prince."

She stepped again, and now the fear in his voice was very real.

"Stay away from me, she-devil! Didn't your father sell all his people to the Dark One so he could live forever? Doesn't he send curses all over the world?"

"No! He does *not!*"

"He's the ally of Rannon. Everybody knows that. Didn't he send you here to catch me for his tortures?"

"No. He doesn't even know you're here. I don't see him much anymore. He's always in his tower reading old books."

This seemed to calm the newcomer. After a few minutes he let Amadel touch him, and he said nothing as she led him up to the cave, halfway up the cliff face and reached by a narrow path. Within was a spring, as Amadel had said, and the boy drank deeply from it.

Refreshed, he sat down and looked at her cautiously.

"Are you really his daughter?"

"Yes. Didn't I tell you I was?" She didn't understand this questioning, but then she knew so little about the people in the rest of the world.

"I never knew he had a daughter. None of the stories say he does."

"Well, he does."

"Who was your mother?"

Now it was Amadel who could find no words. "I don't know," she said. "My father wouldn't tell me much about her. I know her name was Hamakara, and I look like her."

"They say — the people back home — that he had a wife named Hamakara, and he gave her over to Rannon to save his own life. They say he's terribly evil."

"He's not. He's just very . . . distant. He shuts himself away a lot, but he's not evil. I can remember when he was loving. When I was little he was."

The boy pondered this.

"Maybe some of the stories are wrong. Part of them, anyway. You said he doesn't know I'm here. Please, just for now at least, don't tell him. You rescued me and I owe you a lot, and I shouldn't ask you anything, but I ask this. Keep me a secret for a while."

"If you want."

"Can I stay here, in this cave? Can you bring me food every day?"

"I can get you food right now. Are you hungry?"

"Yes." He was wary of her again. He watched her closely as she walked to the mouth of the cave, stopped, and called out a string of strange words. She came back in, sat down

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beside him and said, "Wait a minute."

A tiny cloud of what seemed to be smoke drifted into the cave, coalesced into a ball, grew, and became a man holding a basket in his hand. He set down the basket and at a sign from Amadel vanished.

The boy looked at her with wonder. "So you are a magician, too!"

"No. You don't have to be a magician to call them if you know the words. They're all around."

"Does your — father conjure them?"

"When he needs them."

"Then won't the — ghost tell him I'm here?"

"Oh, no. They're too stupid to remember anything."

He took the covering off the basket. Within were bread, eggs, a gourd of wine, and some smoked meat.

"Is this real?"

"Try it."

He took a bite of the bread. It was very solid, maybe a little stale. He was so nervous he could hardly swallow it.

THE BOY'S name was Menas, and Amadel kept him in the cave, her own private secret. He could not remember his father, and his mother had died of the plague when he was small. When he was six he was sold to a sea captain who made him first a serving boy, then an apprentice, then gave him his freedom and made him his son. With the captain he sailed over much of the world visiting many wonders, and had been sailing still until the night before when the storm came. It had been a struggle to guide the ship away from the looming black cliffs of the unknown coast, whither the wind and the current seemed determined to carry it. Hours of wet toil had ended suddenly with the heavy crunch that all sailors fear, the feeling beneath their feet that the keel has struck something solid. Then came the rending of decks, headlong tumbling, a struggle to stay above the raging sea, voices crying far off, and unconsciousness, until he awoke to find the waves lapping around his ears and a web of ropes over his face.

He told her all he could of the world and its peoples, all the good things and much of the evil mixed together. It didn't seem to bother her that the things he described were not much like those in the glittering romances. The novelty had its own value. Some things were the same, too. Menas had been to a tournament once in the city of Nedek, very much like the one in *Valan and Ishurti,* and there really were thick forests and green meadows on the mainland. He had been born in a city with unimaginably huge crowds, and he had seen woods and rivers and snow-capped mountains. All these things were completely solid and real now with his telling of them.

In turn she told him of her life, of her ride into the sky on the back of a winged unicorn, and this was more fantastic to him than any tale he had heard before. He could not control his amazement, and he became a little afraid of her again, but when she told of no baleful brewing of spells in castle towers, no casting of dooms upon passing ships, this passed. She read to him from books and tried to teach him to read also. His education had been of the world only.

They spent long hours together in that cave above the narrow beach as the waves picked away at the broken toy of the ship, now ignored. At times they did search the ship, but little was in it, and sometimes she took him inland to see the empty houses, but there was little in those either. He was always unhappy about going inland, and never would come within sight of the castle. Amadel never understood this fear entirely, but accepted it and didn't force him.

They became friends and slowly, inevitably, they learned to love. A

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touch became longer, and then became a touch of a different sort, and led to something in which both were altogether ignorant. In the end, they coupled there on the rough, pebble-strewn floor of the cave, and although both were sore afterwards with bruised backs and knees, this was, indeed, the greatest of many wonders.

NOW IN those days Amadel sometimes saw her father at mealtimes. He left her entirely unsupervised, but occasionally she would come into one of the dining halls expecting that she would have to command the spirits to set her table, only to find the table already set for two and Throdrexon seated. Somehow, he knew when she was coming. He had a strong sense of ritual, and at times when custom demanded it, on the feast days of some of the lesser gods, on the first day of spring or on other such occasions, he would dine with her in his great hall while many shapes would rush about serving. Sometimes there would be ghostly guests at some of the other tables, and conjured musicians would play faint, ethereal tunes on wind-instruments made out of candleflame and shadow.

A short while after Menas' arrival, Amadel found Throdrexon in this room at dusk. She was hungry and tired, having spent the whole day with her friend exploring the intricacies of the island's caves and amazing him with what few tricks of illusion she knew. She came into the great hall where once Throdrexon's wedding had been held. It was a room which had known the splendors of many-colored gowns, of jewels, of dancing figures and earthly music. Now it was drafty, filled with dust and echoes.

When she came in she saw that her father was already seated on his high throne at the head of the table. He indicated a place prepared for her by his right hand and she sat down. She dared not tell him what she had been doing, but she wanted to hear his voice, to know if she could still reach him with words. But he would not speak. He ignored direct questions, and after a while she too was silent. Perhaps he was thinking profoundly on some problem of philosophy and could not be distracted. She told herself it would be for the best. She didn't want to break his train of thought. He was a most learned man, less of a wizard now and more of a scholar. Of course he was the greatest scholar in all the world. Perhaps that was it. Some obtuse matter. She didn't know. She wasn't sure of his ways anymore.

It was only at the end of the meal, as the Prince rose to leave that he spoke at all. He stared intently at the still seated Amadel and said to her in a voice that was stiff and without expression:

"Let not the fine metal be tempered with the base. It gains no strength that way."

And he went out of the room without another word. She knew better than to follow him and ask what he meant. He had said all he intended to.

She took food to Menas again the next morning, but didn't mention what had happened. They sat on the beach that day poring over a book. Amadel was still fascinated by what her friend could tell her of the world, but at the same time she realized that he knew little of what she did, and it was only fair that they trade information. Today she was teaching him to read, as she herself had been taught. She told him part of the story of the epic, *The Song of the Great Stone*, and it excited him greatly. Then she showed him the opening of the poem in the book, and taught him to understand it word by word, line by line, until it was clear and they could move on to another section.

It was a bright, clear day with a gen-

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tle breeze, and they sat there undisturbed throughout the length of it reading the book and digging into the sand with their toes. One of the brainless spirits brought them lunch.

That night Throdrexon was again seated at the dinner table, and again he spoke only once, and this time there was a trace of sternness in his voice.

He said, "The Princess of Iankoros is a sacred person."

She was troubled. The drift of his meaning was coming through. On the third night he spoke again, and this time his tone was of suppressed anger.

That was when he said, "The power of the virgin is very great."

Chapter 13: A Prisoner

THAT NIGHT Amadel watched her father's window from her own. Light streamed from the Tower of Eagles until very late. It was still streaming when she dozed off, and this was good. It meant that Throdrexon was working on another of his secret projects, and he would be up till dawn, then sleep through the day. She would not be seen leaving the castle in the morning.

A few hours later she rose and ran to the cave where Menas hid. She roused him and said, breathlessly, "You'll have to leave. He suspects."

The boy was terrified. Although Amadel had told him that her father was kind, and not a wicked wizard, he had never believed her, and now her own distress confirmed all his fears.

"But how? How can I get away?"

"Build a boat or something," said Amadel.

"With what?"

"Wood from the one that was wrecked. It's still lying around."

"Yes, I think I could build a raft, and maybe get out to where a ship could pick me up. I mean, where it could pick us up."

"Us?"

"What? You're coming, aren't you? Don't you want to get away from this horrible place?"

"Yes, I do. But —"

"But what? Hurry. We haven't much time."

"I can't go, because I'm princess here, and that's very important."

"You're princess of *what?*"

"Of Iankoros. The Princess of Iankoros is a sacred person."

"But there isn't any Iankoros anymore. No one lives here. It's just mud and rocks and ruins. If you stay, you'll live all your life alone, and you'll grow old alone. You'll get bent and ugly and you'll never have known what it's like to live at all. You won't have any children, any family, anything at all except an empty falling down castle. You told me before you wanted to get away from here. Why can't you now, when there's a chance?"

"I — I don't know." She began to cry. He took her hand, then drew her close and put his arms around her.

"Look," he said. "You know and I know what's happened. It's something that happens in books that happens to noble knights and ladies at the end of long adventures. Well, it's not just for them. It's happened to us too, here, now. I love you Amadel, and I can't go away without you. Where would I go? I have no one. The captain and everybody I knew is drowned. Please . . ."

"All right. I'll go, because —"

"Because?"

"I love you, too!"

They turned to leave, and just at that moment there was a thunderclap from without the cave, a rushing of wind, and the sound of leather wings beating. Both looked in horror at the figure that filled the opening. It was Throdrexon, full of wrath, and behind him crouched down was a thing,

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like a monstrous black ape with arms thicker than a man, and huge, flabby wings folded on its back.

Amadel shrieked. Menas stood frozen.

The Prince addressed first the boy. "*Do you like my monkey? He'll take* you away from here, don't worry." Then to his daughter: "He suspects? Yes, yes, he suspects. Has he not eyes and ears in his own land? Did he not know from the first — *from the first* — that his daughter was a harlot? Did he not watch in his perspective glass when she defiled herself and her name and her lineage? And did he not wait until the right moment, until he had thought of the fitting punishment? He did. Indeed, he did!"

She felt like she was going to be sick. She wanted to die. It was torture to speak even a word.

"Father, what will you do to him?"

"*To him?* You ask about him before yourself? What does it matter? He's trash. The world is full of trash already."

"Father, don't hurt him!"

"Get out of this cave! Go!" Before she could again speak the thunder returned, and she found herself outside without having walked, dropped roughly on the stones. The ape was between her and the cave mouth, and she dared not approach. Then the creature went inside, and she heard her father say, "Now! You'll be my eunuch? Yes? Yes?" Menas screamed, and a moment later the ape re-emerged with the boy in its arms. There was blood down his front.

Throdrexon followed. "Take him where you will!" he said, and the beast spread its wings and was off, quickly becoming no more than a black dot in the sky off to the west, then was gone completely.

Amadel began to weep uncontrollably, to pound the ground with her fists and tear her hair. Her father

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towered over her and said, "Daughter, whose name I shall nevermore utter, from this day forward you shall never leave my castle. I shall set a charm against you on all the doors, gates, and windows, and while I live you shall not go out."

He took her roughly by the arm and dragged her back to the castle, and she left behind a trail of tears.

IT WAS true. From that day onward none of the gates to the outside would open to her, not the main one, not the rear, not the secret ways for passing in and out. Once at the end of a long corridor she espied a rectangle of light and ran toward it. It was the door by which Throdrexon had left that night years before when he set out for the Underearth. It had never been closed and its hinges were rusted solid, but when Amadel approached the rust fell off, the door swung forward with a low moan, and it slammed hard in her face as if of its own volition. She fell to the floor with a bloodied nose and wept.

Amadel, distraught, wandered all throughout the castle. Her hair was uncombed, her clothing torn and dirty. She looked for another way out, but there was none. She laughed, she cried, she sang to herself. She thought she was going mad and welcomed it. She prayed for madness, hoping to find relief, but even that was denied her.

Still, she read her books, and only one of them was true to her anymore. This was Onda Rithon's *Tale of the Black Mountain*. The evil wizard in this story was very real — he was Throdrexon — and his hopeless captive was herself. The ending seemed to be her inevitable ending too. She read over and over again how that hapless maiden drowned herself in a mountain pool beneath a waterfall, her hair and gown spreading out on the water like the petals of some beautiful, broken flower. Amadel had no mountain pool, and the moat of the Phoenix Nest was long empty. She could not reach the sea, but still she resolved to end her life. There were many towers she could jump off of, many high windows, many ledges. A crash to the stone pavement would be quick enough.

She waited until nightfall on a night when there was no moon, when the stars alone would witness her deed. She went to the window of her own room and sat on the sill, letting her legs dangle in the space beyond. She looked up at the sky she would nevermore see, at the towers and roofs of the castle she hated, and began to repeat softly the words to a melancholy song, chanting them with hardly any tune:

Oh the white bird flies so high up in the sky
And the black bird flies with him twice as high,
And I ask them now, Oh when can I?
Oh, never, never, never, never.
Oh, never, never, never, never.
Oh, the great ship sails on the wide, wide sea,
Can you tell me when a ship comes for me?
Oh, never, never, never, never.
Oh, never, never, never, never . . .

It was time. She took a deep breath, as if about to dive into water, and pushed herself off.

She was falling. It was like a flight in a dream, unreal, almost beautiful. The windows whirled around her, and the stars did too. She spun around and around and around, her hair flying. She saw the pavement rise up to meet her —

"Stop!" It was her father's voice. She saw his face below, his outstretched arms. She was falling into them —

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It was very cold. She was in a cloud of mist and something gently bore her up, up the wall, past the windows, to her own room. It carried her over that sill on which she had sat, and placed her on her bed. Then it dispersed and she was alone. There was another word shouted, and a clank of metal. Bars appeared in her window, and in every other one in the castle that was more than one story up.

So she could not even die. Did he know everything, or was it just chance? She would be watched for sure now. She would never be able to cast herself off a wall, or a ledge, or anything. Something else would stop her if there were no bars.

She pressed her face up against them and felt the cold metal. Down below in the courtyard her father was moving, slowly, as if sleep-walking. He went not to the door that would lead him up to her room, but away, in the direction of the armory. This was so inexplicable that she put fear aside and followed him.

By the time she reached the yard, he was at the door of the armory, hesitant. She ran to catch up, silent in her bare feet. The night wind cut through her light gown, and the pavement was like ice. She hugged herself for warmth.

He went inside, and she trailed after, more slowly now, into the almost total darkness. Her eyes adjusted and she saw him pressing a stone on the wall. A passage was revealed and he entered, not bothering to close the way behind him. She stayed in the shadows for a minute, until he was a little ways down the tunnel, then followed. The floor inside was even colder, painful for her to walk on. The darkness in the tunnel was absolute, but then up ahead a light sparked, a witchlight on the tip of her father's finger. He held it up like a candle to guide his way. The passage wound ever downward into the heart of the isle, until they came to another door which Throdrexon also touched and left open, grown incautious with age, solitude and distraction. Amadel had no idea how far down they went. There were many doors, and she lost track of them. At times the floor was so steep that it broke into steps. It seemed like miles, and always it was damp and bitterly cold.

When at last the final door was open and the tunnel ended, they came to the shore of a black river running through a vast underground grotto, in and out of the infinite and impenetrable. The place was lit dimly, weirdly, by blue stones set in the walls like torches. As he entered, Throdrexon extinguished his light, and the blue stones seemed to glow all the brighter.

The girl saw huge fangs of solid drippings hanging from the ceiling, and others growing from the floor. It seemed she was in the mouth of a dragon. She had been swallowed and the urge to scream was almost unbearable.

Then she saw, by the very edge of that evil stream, what seemed to be a thing of marble, half a bed and half an altar. On it lay bones, pale and thin like those that had lain always in the courtyard above. These alone did not frighten her, but when she saw that the skeleton was still dressed in rags which once had been the gown of a noble lady, and that the fingers were still rich with golden rings very much like the ones she owned, and that on the brittle skull there rested a crown, marked with the sign of the tail of the Phoenix, the emblem of her own house, she felt a very strong inner terror indeed.

There was more: Throdrexon knelt before this object and began to speak, saying, "Dearest, I have returned to you again, my source and my strength. My heart is heavy with woe this night, for our daughter is lost to

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us. She has defiled herself and defied me. What shall I do? What shall I do?"

He stopped, as if listening, and then his voice rose. He was pleading. He broke into tears.

"Dearest, can it be that all we've struggled for has come to naught? I was angry with her, but inside my soul I was very hurt. I died a little when I found out, when I saw her lie with him. I watched through my glass, fuming. I wanted to send a demon to smite them both, but I controlled myself. I showed mercy. But I knew the pain that only a father can know, when his child is his child no longer. Tonight she cast herself from her window to escape me forever. Am I so monstrous? Does she prefer Rannon to me?"

His sobs were hoarse and rasping. They echoed back and forth through the cave. His voice cracked, and he seemed very old and frail just then.

After a while he was silent, again listening. He nodded his head more than once, and said, "Yes, you are right. We shall talk of other things." Then he told of imaginary affairs, of the economy of his kingdom, of the hiring and dismissal of ministers, of intrigues. He told of wars fought in his fancy, of armies which never existed, of dreamlike feasts that were never held in his empty, dust-filled court. It was rambling, disjointed like an incomplete tale imperfectly copied in an old book.

His voice dropped to a whisper and he spoke lovingly to the sickly, dead thing. He climbed up on the marble altar and laid down beside it. He kissed the bare teeth and put his arms around the delicate shoulders. The bones rattled hollowly and Amadel could stand it no longer. She took the end of her gown in her mouth to try and stifle a scream but it came anyway, as a long, low, whining moan, and her feet went out from under her. She swooned.

She was not fully unconscious. She felt hands lifting her up, and her eyes opened. She was raised out of nightmare into nightmare, and Throdrexon held her. He pointed to the altar.

"So you have followed me," he said. "You know all now. It is well that you do. Look. This is your mother, my beloved Hamakara."

She could only scream, "Bones! They're bones!" She broke from him and ran up the passageway. She tripped on the steps and banged her knees. She felt her way along the dripping walls in utter blackness, until at last she came to the secret opening in the armory. She ran across the courtyard, up to her own room. She fell down upon her bed and muffled her shrieks in her pillow.

Chapter 14: The Reveries

THRODREXON (IN DARKNESS):

Bones, child? I have lost you, and yes, everything is bones now, all the world turned to bones and ashes, the ruin of all that was once so fair. I remember how it was. I do. There are voices within me and they will not leave me alone. I cannot rest. There is a power that rises up awesome and unseen like a bottomless sea of spirits crying, "Hear us! Hear us!" And I answer, "Speak! Speak! I hear you!" Yet they do not speak, and only call all the louder, "Hear us! Hear us! Hear us, Oh mad one!" And when they call me mad I know I am so. This crying in the mind betokens madness, I am sure. My walls are breached. An unconquerable army presses against me, presses, presses, presses — I hear; I tremble; I cannot resist. I say to myself, "What is this? What am I to make of this?" and I hide behind a mask of bewilderment, and still I die a slow death within me, a death that has been my lot since I first drew breath. Oh, I wish that my mother's womb had been my grave, that she had died

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forever great with me. I curse the day whereon I was born and curse him who came to my father saying to him that a son was born, making him very glad. Let there be no more gladness. I am tired of gladness and find it false. Let those who shout for joy be struck dumb. Let those who dance be lame. Let no more children come into the world, and let midwives be slaughtered for the good of mankind. Then will the earth be virgin again as it was before the gods, the conspiring cowardly gods, fled before Rannon. A curse on them all!

(A pause. Somewhere in the background water drips. A wind rises slowly, just barely audible. The Prince shivers.)

My eyes are opened now, and lo, I have seen the end. Child, I did not teach you magic because it opens the eyes, and seeing is worse than not seeing, truth worse than lies. You learn first a little thing, and this leads to another, another truth, and another, and another, until they become vast and dense and terrible, and you are overwhelmed. In the end when all is revealed — terror! I could not give you that.

There is no forgiveness for me. As I sought what was justly mine I was unjust. I made no excuses for myself and did the inexcusable. All my dreams were torn away, all my hopes, and I have come to the end of the tunnel. I shall seek no more. Theremderis, you would understand, you who taught me all things but wisdom. I have tried — tried — to make it so that some good can come of my wreck, so that the ashes may again stir in some distant dim time. There is nothing for me. Hamakara has returned in my idle fancies, and she has not changed. In my mind she is as young as she ever was, and her laughter and her smile have not altered. She shall be with me alone, alone, alone, down the long track of my empty, silent years.

AMADEL:

When first I knew of the world I had a dream and it frightened me. I saw a huge night spider whose web was the universe, and I knew that even the stars were but drops of dew on the strands of his web. I watched him walking back and forth across the sky, looking down on the earth, which was a morsel he had caught but not yet eaten. He came slowly, slowly down, upon the earth, and his jaws were wide.

That was my dark dream. I have dreamed also of green fields, of palaces and cities and towns, of mountains and rivers with ships on them. I saw them in my books and when Menas spoke they became true in his words. He was apart of those fields where knights rode in their splendid armor and maidens frolicked among the flowers. When I sleep sometimes I see these things still, and when I wake I look out of my prison over hills of grey mud with deep furrows cut in them by rain. For many years I thought this island was all there was and my father the one, the primal man, all powerful like a god, but now I know that he is the night spider, and his house is the house of Death. There are bones here, and my father has invited Death to come and live with him on Iankoros, crouching and invisible among the bones. I think this land was green once, before Death came, and I think that it will never be green again.

Oh Menas! Sweet, dear, beloved Menas, don't think me a traitor if a hero comes to me and I go with him. I shall call a hero to me somehow, a knight from those wide, green fields, as Halymon did when she was held by the giant, as Orleab did on Dragmond's Isle. It shall be my great task, and for this alone shall I live my days.

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Chapter 15: The Coming of The Hero

AMADEL FOUND her room with its bars oppressive and spent most of her time in the open air on a porch, high among the rooftops of the castle. When the weather was fair she slept there too. She sat for months as the seasons changed, weeping, hoping that her sobs and her soft, somber songs would convey themselves somehow over the sea, perhaps on the wind, and into the ears of a knight who would come to rescue her. But still the days went by, and the rain and the snow came, and she retreated inside. That winter was the most dismal she had ever known and the castle remained dark, cold and empty, save for Amadel in the great hall and Throdrexon in his tower, reading his strange books and chanting stranger names.

Then, with the return of spring the birds of the cliffs came to Amadel, and said to her, "Why does the lady weep, who spoke with us and gave us food?"

"Because I have no wings," she replied, "and I cannot fly from this place as you can."

"You're too heavy to carry."

It was these words that called to her mind something she had read long ago, something with great precedent in the romances. She bade the gull come a little closer. She spread bread crumbs in her lap and it came for them. As it ate she tore a scrap of paper from the margin of a book, and wrote on it a plea to some unknown hero, telling of her woes and her condition. She took the bird in hand, and with a hair from her head tied the message to its leg, then set it free.

After that she wrote a message a day and sent it on a bird, and she waited and counted a hundred birds. Some of the notes were lost in the sea, some rubbed off on the rocks of the Black Cliffs, a few puzzled over by the man who dumped fish guts on the wharf in Nedek, and one or two went before other eyes. Still Amadel hoped and stole parchment from her father to write more. She saw him not at all during this time, since she seldom strayed from her porch or he from his tower. She was truly alone, and wished desperately for an end.

THE END came at last one morning, as she awoke from a troubled sleep on the hard stones of the porch and found the air filled with flapping birds. They swarmed over her by the hundreds and perched on roofs, ledges and chairs. She choked on the drifting feathers.

"What has happened? Why do you come like this, my friends?"

"A ship, lady! A ship!"

"Where?"

"Near the harbor! Look! Look!"

Her position gave her an excellent view of the island and the sea. She could not see the harbor itself, which was below the cliffs but she did spy clearly, on the route to the entrance of that harbor a ship with a great square sail and a scarlet emblem on it, the sign of some house she knew not. The vessel drew nearer, bobbing up and down in the brine, until finally she could make out sailors on the decks. So many of them! It was as if all the world were coming. The vessel quickly vanished. It had entered the narrow, hidden harbor.

She turned away quickly and thanked the birds. She rushed through them and down from the perch. She came to her own room and looked at herself in a mirror. She was a mess, her hair stringy and matted, her once white dress now grey and tattered. It was this simple. A hero had come to take a *princess* to his own land, and he would find a princess, not a beggar girl. She would meet him in her finest gown, the gown

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she had kept locked away for such an event as this, the flowing blue one with the gems like stars. She would wear her golden tiara with the sign of the Phoenix, and carry her wand of carven narwhale's horn.

She commanded a spirit to bring her a bucket of hot water, tore off her filthy old clothes and dumped the bucket over her head. She scrubbed herself briefly, then dressed as a princess should. She laughed as she brushed feathers away from her hair.

When all was ready, she descended to the courtyard. She looked all around the crumbling towers and rooftops, then turned to the gate. She tried to work the mechanism to lower the drawbridge, but the lever would not budge, and the great gears refused to turn.

"Daughter, have you forgotten the charm I laid on this place? Never shall you leave it, as long as I still live."

She turned in forgotten horror and beheld her father. She hardly recognized him at first, so shockingly aged he was. His shoulders were beginning to stoop and his hair and beard were almost entirely grey. His face was hollow, his eyes sunken and red. He was dressed in armor which hardly fit him. Pulled on hastily over his regular clothing was a finely wrought breastplate of gold with the sign of the Phoenix studded in rubies, leg and arm guards, mail and a round helm. His sword, Dran, hung at his side, and he bore a triangular shield of featureless silver.

"Father, why are you here?"

"To repel the invader. To drive off this one who comes to take what is not his." As the Prince spoke, there came from outside the gate the sound of metal-shod feet tramping, perhaps a dozen men marching up the road to the castle. They stopped, and a voice called out:

"How now, Wizard, where is this maiden you hold so treacherously captive?"

Throdrexon's reply was a taunt. "Go away, little boy, before I squash you. My sword has a powerful word on it, and no man can conquer me."

"And what is that word?" the challenge returned.

Throdrexon drew forth Dran and waved it in the air, as if the other could see it. He began to shout with great confidence, but then his voice faltered and grew faint, and croaked into despair.

"The word is this, put on the sword Dran by Elthanos, King of the Dwarves — Many heads shall this sword cut off . . . but the last shall be . . . Oh, horror! What am I saying? . . . The head . . . of . . . *wisdom.*" Amadel heard him whisper to himself, "After wisdom, is its power *gone!* Oh, Theremderis!" He turned and gazed at the skull which watched him now. "Theremderis! Theremderis!"

"What's the matter?" called the voice from beyond the gate. "Have you lost your tongue? Coward!" Metal clanged. A grappling hook caught on the wall over the raised drawbridge.

Throdrexon faced his daughter and said, "I must fight now as a warrior and not as a wizard, for I swore in my youth to protect this isle with Dran, and the power of Dran is dearly spent. I shall meet my death this day, and it is your doing. I shall not go into the halls of Rannon, for I have found a way around that, through the secret of the cleverest of all wizards, Tharalopos, who blew his soul out like a candle and lived only in body. Still, faithless, filthy daughter, you are my end. Now I must sing my dirge and none will mourn me, not even you. I ask you only to listen in silence and do me this last honor, and if you can, remember some of the words."

"But, Father?" She suddenly felt pity for him, and her fear began to weaken. "Why is it that you must die?

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Please, just take the spell from the gate and let me go. You yourself said I am unworthy, your faithless, filthy daughter. Why should you die for one such as me?"

"*Silence!* Can you never obey me?"

He began to sing his funeral dirge, and he sang in a fine, deep voice, with all manly strength, all dignity and grace, as befitted one of his ancient lineage:

I am Thindarek's son,
So great a hero,
And to his ghost I sing,
This solemn death-song.
Of old I swore my oath.
It is not broken.
With Dran in hand I stand,
And face the foeman.

The verses went on, retelling all his deeds, all his strivings and his hopes, his triumphs and his failures, his guilts and his sorrows. He told for the first time fully the tale of Hamakara, how he loved her and lost her, and defied Rannon himself to get her back. When Amadel heard this she knew how great a man he had been, how magnificent, how brave. His whole life was a terrible irony, and his death would be an even greater one if he perished here, now, for the sake of an ancient oath and a daughter whose name he would not speak.

"Father! Stop! Don't die! I'll send him away! I'll stay with you forever! *Listen to me!*"

But he would not listen. He finished his last verse:

And from dread Rannon's realm,
I have rescued her.
Far down beneath the earth,
Her soul is ashes.
Now for his household slave,
He shall not have her,
And when my last night comes,
I die contented.

By this time the foreign knight was on the top of the wall. He lowered his rope down into the courtyard and began to descend. Amadel saw him for the first time. He was tall, muscular, his hair bleached yellow and his face tan. His armor was copper-colored with the red sign of the serpent and the fish emblazoned on it. He, too, carried a long sword, and a shield with his sign again displayed. He struck the pavement with a clatter, almost losing his balance. He recovered himself and seemed about to speak another insult, but the words never came.

Throdrexon chose to notice him. "So you are the one," he said.

With that the other's awe was gone. "Yes, I am the one. Now meet your death at the edge of a human sword. I spit on your magic and your words!"

With that the two of them fought, and great sparks flew where Dran struck the other blade. Throughout the day the two contended, and the poets have since made much of it, telling in stories and in songs of the wizard and the warrior in that courtyard, sometimes Throdrexon winning with the other almost at his mercy, sometimes the reverse as the knight sprang up with renewed strength. The sun arched over the sky and beheld them there, both bleeding from fearsome wounds, both of them with swords ragged like the edges of saws, with their shields smashed and their armor torn and dented. Both of them were amazed at the strength and skill of the other as they hewed and hewed and hewed, and the only witness to the combat were the girl, the skull, and the empty windows.

It seemed there was a magic in Dran yet, a magic of strength which moved Throdrexon's arm when mortal muscles should have tired. The knight came to realize as he parried with his increasingly leaden

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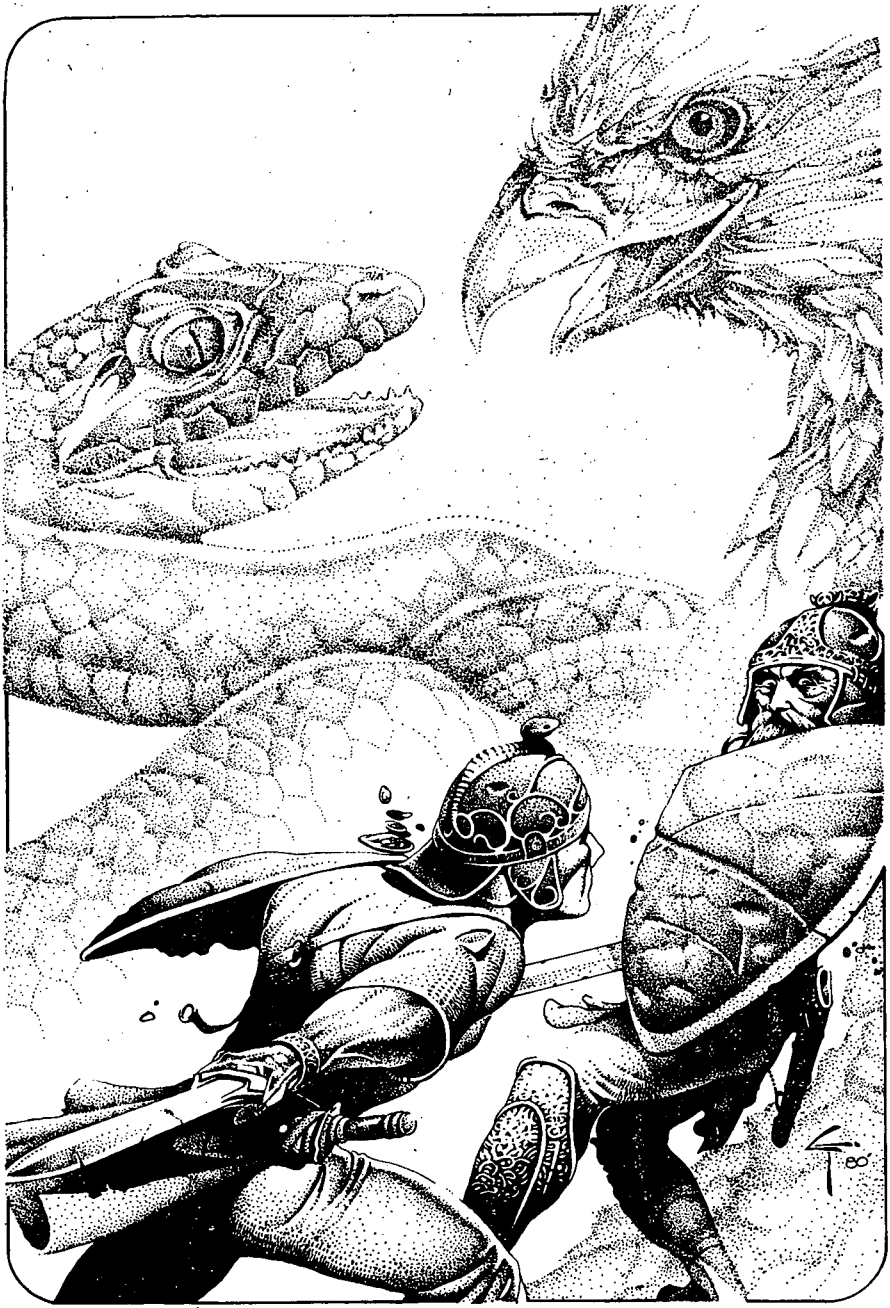

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blade, streamed sweat and felt his heart pound, that this one who was old enough to be his father would surely win unless he lost hold of that sword. So he took on a new strategy, and only feinted when he seemed to seek Throdrexon's throat and breast.

"Oho!" cried the Prince. "You fight less fiercely! I've got you!"

It was at that instant that the knight made his move. He struck one blow with all his might behind it aimed not at his opponent's vitals but at his wrist. It caught Throdrexon entirely by surprise and sliced through with little resistance. The knight reeled from the unspent force of the swing, while Throdrexon gasped in pain as Dran and the hand that still held it dropped to the pavement.

With what he knew would be his last breath, he recited the short formula he had labored over for so many years in seclusion. Now he was safe. His soul would pass into nothingness with his flesh, forever beyond the reach of Rannon. When the last word was uttered he smiled and looked at his daughter, his living emblem of defiance. *I've fooled you this time, Oh, Lord of Darkness,* he thought. *I've won. Let the earth shake!*

In the future, were more victories possible? Would someone free all those souls in the Underearth, either into oblivion or some other place or existence? Who could tell?

He looked at his daughter again. He knew it would take a long time for her to frame such a design. Perhaps she never would, but by the telling of his tale, inspire someone else to do a deed far greater than any of his own.

Then the knight brought his sword up and around, and down, crashing through Throdrexon's helmet, through his skull, cleaving him unto the jawbone.

The body collapsed; the knight drew his sword from the ruined head; and he also fell down, too exhausted to move.

Amadel began to wail.

At last the knight rose unsteadily, and he took the princess by the arm. He opened the gate easily and led her from the castle after the drawbridge creaked down. The troop of guardsmen outside raised up a cheer when their master emerged with his bride, but the knight could only manage a weak smile and Amadel a sigh.

THIS IS the ending of the tale of Throdrexon and Hamakara, of Amadel and Menas, and the princes of Iankoros. The knight's name was Emanath and in later years he was called "the Great." He took his lady thus rescued out from the castle, away from the sterile isle, and she looked only ahead as she travelled. She sailed over the sea with him south and west, until she came to his country, where she lived with him all the days of her life. She took the name Lamilim Yin, which means "child of sea and air," and she bore him six tall sons, who were children of the earth. Of this knight Emanath, his lady Lamilim Yin, and their six sons, the tales are many and long, and there is no room for them here. ■

Darrell Schweitzer

Readers will soon notice that Schweitzer's name is becoming a regular both in *Fantastic* and *Amazing* with stories as well as interviews with famous science fiction writers. We have duly noted in past issues his degrees from Villanova, his multiple writing credits and current assistant editorship with Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine. This time we asked him for something about his struggles becoming a published writer and received this in reply:

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"My first 'near miss' in selling fantasy was brought about by witchcraft. A practising witch (who alternated between druidism and Satanism) I knew in college agreed to cast a spell to make my next story sell. This was the one I sent to Lin Carter for an anthology back in 1971. One day the witch called me up, very alarmed, and said her cat had messed up the cards. Was I all right? I was, so she continued. While she was doing this, I was supposed to be taking a lavender-scented bath at midnight while burning a green candle (green candles are standard for making money). Alas, *I* didn't.

To this one could attribute the fact that the story was accepted, but the book never came out. In fact, the whole Ballentine Fantasy series died. One wonders what might have happened . . . I was 19 at the time and this was my best attempt at being a prodigy. The story *was* published in *Whispers* when I was 21, which, of course, was too late. It actually has had a good history since. It was reprinted three times, and I used it to convince the admissions people for the 1973 Clarion Workshop that I wasn't utterly hopeless. So I can't say the witch didn't get results. I will admit, however, that I have not attempted to sell a story by supernatural means ever since.

WHY WE CHOSE THIS STORY

Using all the traditional elements of fantasy, Schweitzer has woven a thoroughly engrossing tale, invoking a rather poignant mood that pervades to the end. Although Evil is given the upper hand against a world forsaken by its gods, you never quite give up the hope that Throdrexon might succeed in his quest. And at the end of Part I, the birth of a daughter from his dead wife seems a victory of sorts. In Part II, while the growing young woman yearns toward life, her father sinks ever deeper into his battle with Death, an obsession that twists heart and mind until he resembles his adversary. Amid mixed feelings we see him escape with his soul, but our hopes go with the girl and her knight — that they may find happiness and in the end a true deliverance.

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THE IMPRECISE DELIGHTS OF LOVE

by Wayne Wightman

Illustrated by Elinor Mavor

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SORDOVAK CITICIOUS unhooked himself from his Dynaflow Maxilife Generator and wiped the sweat from his forehead. That last multigasm had nearly turned his blood to water. He took a deep breath and tried to gather his thoughts. What day was it? Monday? Wednesday? By the look of the light on the curtains at the far end of his condo, it was probably night, whatever day it was.

Sordovak pulled out Gloriana Pidundian's libido cassette from the DMG and stuck it back on the shelf in the empty spot between Delinda Oneron and Silvya Romilar. The skin contacts peeled easily off his head — he hung them on the power output handle of the DMG and slowly stood up.

At 24 he felt more tired than he thought he should. He passed a still-sweating palm over the top of his head — beneath the precision Permahair, he feared his own hair roots were dying at a prodigious rate. This was a real concern . . . well, it *had* been a real concern. The Dynaflow Maxilife Generator didn't care if he was scarred, bald, toothless, or had to spend fourteen hours a day plumbed up to a rejuvenation center.

At nineteen, Sordovak had decided that if he couldn't live the wild carefree life of the romantic, always in love, one beautiful clear-skinned woman after another parading in and out of his life, occasionally suffering traumatic but short-term heartbreak, then he would live in the world of his senses with the women of his dreams. They were without complaint, without hesitation, and free of imperfection. Sordovak did not like imperfection.

He lived in his precisely arranged condo, where not a thread was out of place, and was utterly independant of the rabble in the streets of Mantis City and all other outside reality. Well, except for his occasional female contact . . . like the last one, a very disturbing person . . . Delinda Oneron. She was precisely the reason he usually preferred the libido cassettes to the chaotic physical presence. He pushed her memory back in his mind . . . the swells of Gloriana Pidundian still hung in his head.

Sordovak loathed messiness, disarrangement, or any manner of untidiness, so he quickly wiped away the perspiration from his face and tossed the tissue at the Magisweep grate where it vanished into the bowels of the building to be vaporized. He then touched one corner of the tissue dispenser, aligning it precisely with the power output handle of the DMG. Everyone noticed the DMG, first thing on entering his condo. Actually, it wasn't exactly a condo.

It was a meticulously constructed shrine to the senses, it was a center of delight, an electrochemical monument to pleasure, and there was not a speck of dirt anywhere. One wall was banked with readouts that glowed dupernal blue or that subtle shade of green that was found nowhere in nature. Rheostats and switches riddled the brushed chrome faceplates, and in slanting print, the brand names read like a catalogue of electronic royalty.

Behind plexiglass, the opposite wall supported a complete Zedex Autolab, a glistening tangle of pyrex tubing, refrigeration coils, heating units, autovalves, servos, and constantly replenished minivats of those exotic fluids necessary for the concoction of precisely 437 elemental drugs of varying effect — from the mildest dozers to the slamout blocking agents that snapped off all but the most vital synapses as cleanly as the purest death — and from gentle activators to the maddest screamers, and in the realm of hallucinogenics, the range spread from those flamingo pink drinks that tickled the underbelly of the brain with the soft

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feathers of archetypal recollection to the scarcely known KR-3, of which the less said the better. And all Sordovak had to do was punch in the drug type and strength level and then watch as those flawless mechanical hands mixed and stirred his chemical desires together.

What had Delinda Oneron said when she saw the Zedex Autolab?

"I could do some beautiful artwork with all that colored glass."

Given a free hand, she would have it dismantled and restructured into some functionless representation of — what? — a bird? Sordovak snorted.

The third wall contained the Grand Delusion Tri-vid GX3A, a screen in which images cavorted, used to hype whatever state one drifted into or screamed through.

The fourth wall of his condo he rarely noted. There were windows there, curtained off, that looked across the brown city into the vague sky over Ditwiller Lake. The last time he'd looked out there it had been at the urging of the same Delinda Oneron. She had claimed to be a nature-lover, and after failing to wow Sordovak's equipment and then, of all things, after admiring the Rimly vase he'd put out of sight behind the DMG's density module, she had asked him to open the curtains to "let some sky in."

Nature-lover or not, he had finally got her where he'd wanted her — spread out in a formchair with the delusion screen pulsing over-sized erotic imagery at them, and percolating through her blood a sublime mixture of vagizine and trypto-orgasol. Best of all, the Dynaflow Maxilife Generator filled her brain with blazing, raging desire, and taped every quiver, every desire, every fantasy for playback later.

She had stopped breathing once, but the DMG had sensed it and had knocked the wind back into her. For an evening that had begun on such a dissonant chord, it had had a solid B- ending, and that was the way he'd charted it up. "Delinda Oneron . . . B-."

Delinda was not the first to enter his pleasure center, nor would she be the last, if his life rolled along as he planned it, but she had certainly made an impression on him.

Conjoined in the microcircuitry of the DMG, with some part of each of their pleasure centers sending waves of amplified delight back and forth like an over-accelerated game of ping pong of the passions, connected up this way, Sordovak felt something quiver that he had not expected. Some remote part of him *moved* as Delinda Oneron wafted from one crevice of his brain to another like some once-in-a-lifetime perfume.

Sordovak had pawed aside the jungular tangle of pleasures, trying to get a full breath of fresh air into his lungs and to see this Delinda Oneron with his bare eyes, to see who she was, what she was, without the filtered, amplified image projected through his head by the DMG. For the first time in his life he'd wanted to see a woman not to admire her but to understand her.

Well, he saw her.

She lay spread in the formchair like an accident victim. The tangled contacts snaked out of her forehead into the DMG like so many puppet strings, and from her overfull lips trickled a slowly moving worm of glistening saliva.

Sordovak Citicious pushed the power output handle all the way down, cutting off the flow of illusion, then he grasped the handful of contact wires and yanked them off her head. Her eyes clicked open.

"I'm done now," he said. "I want you to go."

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That twisting curl of drool lost its gleam as her lips wordlessly moved. Obviously she did not know the thing was there, and it disgusted him more and more every second.

"You're . . ." Her speech center was beginning to reconnect itself to the rest of her brain. "You're throwing me out? Just . . . unhooking me and throwing me out? But I felt . . . *you.*" She pushed her silky black hair back over her shoulders.

Sordovak waved his hand at the door and pretended to busy himself with removing dust from his cuffs. He glanced at her — she was not his type, he knew now. She was messy, her clothes disarranged . . . and she drooled. She was not his type. Her passion was not orderly.

"Use a tissue," he said offhandedly.

"What for?" she whimpered. Then she stood up. "You think I'm trash, don't you? Just like everything else in this city — use it once and dump it. And since I decided to take a chance and come up here just because you asked me . . ." Delinda looked down at the floor and nodded, as though confirming her motivation. "Just because you asked me and I thought I might trust you. But now I'm garbage, right? Down the chute, right?"

Sordovak silently agreed.

"I trusted you," she said. "That's one point for me."

The imaginary dust was now nearly all gone from his sleeves. He noted that one of her hairs clung to his shirtfront. The shirt would be washed.

"You taped me with that thing, didn't you?"

"The door is this way," Sordovak said.

"You taped me," she said, her voice growing shrill. "That's why you're throwing me out now. When I leave you can play it back over and over and not have to bother with . . . with skin or hair or . . ."

Tears. He could see the tears coming. He felt a glimmer of pride that he'd been foresighted enough to have a full box of Limming Ful-Sorb tissues right there on the table. He nudged the box toward her.

Delinda Oneron cleared her throat and pulled herself up a little higher. "You can congratulate yourself after I go about how fate specified me for you, egoist. I think the other parts of your personality are . . . lost in that machine somewhere. If I were small enough to fit through your Magisweep grate, you'd toss me down there instead of out the door wouldn't you?"

"I haven't touched you," Sordovak said.

"You don't need to," she bellowed. "You've got your god damned machine to do it for you!"

She left.

There is mercy in this world, Sordovak thought.

At last, alone again! He loved his condo, he loved his equipment, he loved this monument — for with it, as long as he could get a trickle of electricity into its circuits and as long as he could get the primary chemicals for the Autolab, he would never have to be bored with being trapped inside his ordinary, garden-variety mind. After all, he had the cassetted libidos of Maurica Sleffa (hot, bright orange desire that came in stacatto bursts) and Jejeune Sandille (who neared death with every spasm) and a dozen others, all different, all neat.

When Sordovak was seventeen and puberty was sufficiently far enough behind him that he could think straight, he realized that he was ordinary. "I," he thought in a depressed tone, "am general issue." His parents tried to convince him otherwise, but he knew they would have said what they said even if half his

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brain were replaced with balsa. This depressed him even more.

When he passed nineteen he woke up, bolted up one night and knew what he had to do. "I have to get *amplified.*"

It had taken six years, but now he had it — a relatively inexpensive condo within a complex of outrageously exclusive living quarters for which the occupants were billed up to half a million bucks a year for the privilege of existing among others who'd paid similar prices — they all loved it. But Sordovak's quarters were small — he needed only enough room for his equipment, a food processing module, and a cleansing and evacuation stall. To pay for it, he'd lined up several of the lonelier male tenants who would use his devices periodically and then accidentally let slip from their pockets to the floor some green crinkled bill with a lot of zeros on it.

Sordovak instructed the Autolab to calm him. It dispensed a cup of dark blue liquid. Librilevelil, the readout said. He drank it down and let the heated waves of the multigasm subside. In a minute he was as calm as Lake Ditwiller and the memory of Delinda Oneron had nearly vanished. He rose from his formchair and strolled once about the condo.

That wasn't enough. The slightest thought of Delinda made his nerves twang. The Autolab could handle it, but . . .

"A new woman," he thought, "a fresh cassette source — that would blot her memory even better."

He rarely pulled the curtains on the fourth wall, but he decided he'd take the chance and "let some sky in." (The memory of Delinda caromed over the lumpy surface of his brain.)

When the curtains flapped open, an odd smell of synthetic something-or-other breezed into his face. Below him some 86 stories lay the swollen, murmuring mismash of Mantis City. The hour was apparently late now, and the centrally suspended solar filaments had been turned to their dimmest glow.

In the streets far below him, the heavy turtlelike sweepers made subtle rumbles as they sucked up the day's million tons of discarded papers, wrappers, old clothes, and the occasional body that found itself deceased in the middle of some perambulation. So vital were the sweepers to Mantis City that by referendum one of them had actually been elected to the Board of City Supervisors as a pointless gesture of appreciation.

Sordovak stepped out onto his meter-wide balcony and looked straight down. In the building's entrance lights, he could observe the erratic stream of people passing slowly by on the sidewalk — three of which appeared to be female. His heart thudded twice amidst the calmer beats, and he knew what that meant.

Sure enough, his palms began to sweat before the image even formed in his head. The multigasm has satisfied his loins only temporarily, and already he was feeling the insistent gentle tickling of his inner thighs.

He would invite one up — if she accepted it would mean a new tape to be recorded, a new landscape of desires and passions to drift through. Pocketing his identification papers, he rushed out of his condo and ordered the express elevator to the ground floor.

The bumbling rumble of the sweepers was louder there. The surrounding buildings were darkened, presenting only facades of varying shades of gray. Sordovak heard steps. He turned. The woman was tall and slender and wore expensive woven albino hair clothes. Her eyes looked out of her narrow face at

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nothing — they seemed to be decorative only.

"Good evening," Sordovak said, affecting a casual slouch. "I just stepped out for a breath of city air — I live in this building, you see."

She slowed and turned enough to look on him, but he did not need to ask: she obviously saw nothing, not him, not his metaphor. Her eyes were as unfocused as bags of water.

"I thought," he said persistently, "that since fate more or less threw us together here — and if you aren't in a hurry to get anywhere, perhaps you'd like to come up and hook into my Dynaflow Maxilife Generator. I think you and I could become interestingly involuted."

She looked through him. Whether she had ever been more than marginally aware of his presence he never knew. Perhaps her senses had been deactivated as a result of some judicial ruling.

He wrote her off. She strolled serenely away into the darkness, the sound of her footsteps gradually swallowed up by the grumbling of another approaching sweeper. Even at this distance down the street, it look mountainous. Like some oversized child's toy it bumped erratically against the curb in which the magniguide tape had been embedded.

Another woman approached, this one plainer, equally as tall, but different, far different in her movements. She twitched her head up and down as though she watched darting insects that made only vertical passes in front of her face — the very idea of flying insects filled Sordovak with a fearful dread . . . who could ever know where their six miniscule feet had walked or what ungodly viruses lurked in their wet sucking mouths. He cringed, but he assured himself that the woman most likely suffered only some minor nervous affliction.

"Good evening," Sordovak said, affecting a casual slouch. "I just stepped out for a breath of city air — I live in this building, you see."

She hit him across the face with her fist so fast that he was on the pavement before he could berate himself for not recognizing a Jerker in her early stages. She probably hadn't meant to strike him even. When he tried to stand up, a curious thing happened. Not only could he not figure out where his feet were, but his head filled with a terrific rumbling noise.

"Dear god," he thought, "a bloodclot — racing right into my eardrum — I'll be deaf for —"

For a second he was positive it was an earclot because he thought he was gyrating through the air, totally out of touch with the ground.

He was half right. He was flying through the air, but there was nothing wrong with his ears. The sweeper had brushed him onto its ribbed conveyor belt and had then spilled him into its holding bin. When his sensibilities rearranged themselves, he realized his hearing was fine, but the air was heavy with dust and he was sitting in a rain of trash. He was being engulfed by *filth*.

Sordovak could remember no nightmare as horrifying as this. All his fears had gathered together and now seized him by the throat. He could not breathe. He tried clawing his way up the side of the bin, four times he tried this, each time falling back into the settling nest of trash. Strange objects flew up his nose with each breath. When he tried breathing through his mouth, they caught in his mouth. Some of them moved.

"I'm dying!" he shrieked. "I'm dying here!"

A light clicked on, a spray of blue-white florescence from a handheld lamp. "I know your voice," a female said.

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"Who are you?" Sordovak gasped, dust racing down his throat. "I'm dying! Get me out!"

"I know you," said the female voice again. "You're the one with all the cute machines. You're the one who crawls through women's heads and when you've got what you want on tape, you unplug them and tell them to leave."

"Get me out of here! Please! Why are you *in* here?"

"Because I'm trash like you."

"I'm not trash! I'm a person!" He tried scaling the bin wall to reach the slot where the conveyor belt dumped the sweep-ups. His fingers could hold it only for a second before it twisted out of his grip. "Please . . . I can't breathe — this dirt . . ."

"Sit over here."

He wanted out, he didn't want to sit down, but there wasn't anything else to do. His fingers felt like they were bleeding, his hope didn't seem like it would last much longer — so he sat down. The air where the voice had indicated did not seem so filthy. The light clicked off.

"You know who I am?" she asked.

"No, but can you get me out of here?"

"I'm Delinda Oneron."

"Oh god. What are you doing in this thing? Why are you here?"

"You treated me like trash, so I went a little crazy. I went out and threw myself in front of the first sweeper that came by. I thought I'd die that way. But I haven't so far."

"You've been in here since last night?"

"That was three days ago," she said.

"No."

"Well, how could you tell anyway, the way you probably hook yourself up to that thing. It was three days ago."

"But I . . . It couldn't have been."

"Suit yourself."

Something heavy dropped into the bin. Bits of trash sprayed up and peppered his face.

"Can you get me out of here?" he pleaded. "How've you been living in here without a food processing module or an evacuation and cleansing stall? My god, I must be filthy."

"You were crud long before you were swept up. How did you get swept away?"

"It was an accident."

"Sure. You were probably crazy too." She clicked on the light and in its field, Sordovak could see a grimy arm reach forward and stir around the debris. It located some dark object and drew it back into the shadow. The light went out.

"What was that?" he asked.

"Food." Her voice was muffled by chewing.

"You eat . . . *garbage?*"

"Sure. I'm trash too, so what's it to you? After three days in here, whatever it was I just ate tasted better than anything I ever got out of a food module."

"You aren't trash," Sordovak said. "You're a real nice person. Can you get us out of here?" A wave of grimy dust sifted over him and trickled down his collar.

"We have to wait till the sweeper empties itself. I've been waiting three days

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so it can't be much longer."

"You mean I could be in here . . . for days? And I'd have to eat . . . what I find in the trash, like you?" He was so repelled by the idea that he shifted away from her, toward the right hand corner of the bin.

She flicked on the light to see what he was doing and then turned it off again. "You'd better not sit on George."

"On what?"

"Not what — *who*. George. Yesterday the sweeper picked up a body. An old man. I pushed him over there out of the way."

Sordovak wanted to scream but he knew that if he did, he'd suck a tablespoon of dust into his lungs along with the air. He wrapped his arms tight around his chest and squeezed — it was almost like having someone care about him. "This is . . ." he finally mumbled in the muffled roar of the sweeper's bowels. "This is . . ."

"Disgusting? Horrifying? Monstrous?"

"Yes, *yes, yes!* All of those! I never thought dying or hell or any kind of torture could be this . . . it's all the things you said." He wanted to whimper. He wanted to beg on his knees and kiss her feet. He wanted out.

"Just sit back and wait, Wonderboy. There's nothing we can do but wait and hope we aren't dumped into a grinder or compacter."

"Oh god."

"Don't you wish you had your machines now, Mister Stimulato. You could drink up and plug in and say goodbye to all this."

"I'm just an ordinary person," he said, wondering as he said it if that was good enough reason for him to be elsewhere. "I'm general issue." He'd never heard himself whine before, but he was whining now.

"I think you're generally more disgusting than any dirt that's swept in here. In light of that, I'd think you'd find your surroundings quite pleasant."

Sordovak didn't find it pleasant in any way — he ached to retreat into the remotest corner of his mind, and he'd be willing to do it without any help from the Autolab or the DMG — but he didn't know how. He just wanted to be elsewhere — and clean.

"Want a piece of potato?" she asked. "I have some gum too if you want it. Maybe it'll take your mind off itself."

He didn't answer. His throat was stiff with dirt.

"Well, wake me up if you need anything," Delinda said. "Like food or something to drink. I've got a little jug of something over here that dropped in the other day. I'm going to sleep for a little while."

"You're going to leave me alone?"

"I'll be right here. Talk to George if you get lonely."

Sordovak shivered.

"If you want something to do," she continued, "you can imagine what it's going to be like if we get dumped into a compacter, or whether we'll be jibbled up first and afterwards pressed into cheap furniture."

"Oh god."

"Whiner," she said flatly.

After that he could only hear the body-thrumming vibration of the sweeper. Sordovak envisioned the bin's bottom flapping open as he and Delinda fell in a cloud of dust into some kind of mangler that would scrape them to death a millimeter at a time. And then to be dehydrated . . . of course that would be irrele-

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vant to his personal feelings at the time . . . and then pressed into cheap furniture affordable to the poor of Mantis City — who would then no doubt paint him some ludicrous high-gloss color like red or orange or violet. He moaned. He whimpered a little. Delinda muttered at him in her sleep.

As the grime fed unceasingly into the bin, Sordovak realized that he would settle for a lot less than refuge in his condo-shrine. Visions of shredding haunted his thoughts.

"An empty room" he thought. "That would be beautiful. Even a dirty empty room. With nothing on the walls but stains."

Gravel sputtered through the intake slit and dinged his head and shoulders. He pulled his knees up tight against his chest and wrapped his arms over his head and neck.

"Even a patch of muddy ground," he mumbled to his knees. "A pile of dirt surrounded by a moat of slime." He saw the teeth again, snapping and scraping at his naked skin. He imagined flakes of his teeth on the drying trays beneath heat lamps.

"I would kiss dirt," he thought, "if I could only walk on it."

And Delinda . . . He remembered the way they had crawled into each other's minds, and even ignoring the lubricating warpage of the Autolab's fluid delight, there had been something in her that had drawn him deeper into her knowledge of herself, into her recollections of warm days and sunlight and water and people laughing. But then he had seen the trickle of drool and had pulled loose the contacts . . .

"What are you doing?!" Delinda shouted, snapping on the light. "Stop it! You don't help either of us hitting yourself like that." She pulled his fists away from his face.

"Fool fool fool utter sniveling fool . . ." he chanted.

"You make me want to go crazy again," she said. "You have a real knack for that. You must be some kind of special person." She did not sound like she meant to flatter.

"I'm all right now."

The rumble of the tires on the street changed, became high-pitched, as though the sweeper was moving faster.

"You know," she said, after he'd calmed down, "I'd never been connected to one of those things before — that machine you had. Just as I felt my brains coming loose and when I — I don't know how to describe it — when I felt you moving around inside me, then I realized you'd put something in that drink you gave me. Just before everything came loose, I realized all that colored glass on the wall was a drug center and that you'd drugged me. You didn't tell me."

"I thought you knew."

"I guess I'm a girl from the country. I don't like for anyone to play with my personality without asking permission. I just thought people who liked each other were supposed to talk to each other and you find out what I tell you and I find out what you tell me."

"Talk?"

"It's slow but it's interesting."

"But people hide things from each other."

"Not for long, if they like each other. You find privacy disgusting too? Along with everything else involving people?"

"I just thought . . ."

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"You thought that if you bought enough equipment you wouldn't have to go to the trouble of getting acquainted with anybody? You thought you could hook yourself up to someone and your expensive machines would give you low-distortion instant intimacy? All things revealed in seconds? That's not the way people are. I'm surprised you could see any difference between one person and another when you override all the stops like that . . . Wait a minute."

She touched his arm.

"You feel that? Hear it?" she asked. "I think we're stopping. We are. Listen to that."

There was a new noise, something from beyond the sweeper — a grinding gnashing noise.

"We're going to be dumped!" he shouted in her ear. "What can we do?"

"We can hope we might be dumped in a heap and can just walk away from it."

The sweeper vibrated; hummed slightly, and then went dead silent. For a moment, all Sordovak could hear was the heavier particles falling to the floor of the bin. Then, two snaps were followed by the hiss of escaping pressurized air.

"I can't stand this," he said, the swell of hysteria rising in his voice. "I wasn't meant to deal with this kind of anxiety!"

"You thought you would live forever?" she said as she pulled him up against one side of the bin. The floor had begun to sink in the middle, becoming V-shaped. Rubbish trickled toward the center at first; then the heavier pieces began shifting. In the blue-white glare of the lamp they saw the body in the corner begin its slide toward the middle.

"We can't hold on much longer," Delinda said. "After George goes, we go."

"But *where* do we go?" The last word caught in his throat like a hook.

"Out to take our chances. There he goes — I just didn't want us to go out first and have him land on us. Okay, come on."

Sordovak couldn't have held on by the friction of his sweating hands any longer. Most of the trash had slid out now and bright daylight beamed in through the still-widening crack in the floor. Sordovak and Delinda slid forward, falling on their backs as their feet raced downward.

They fell only several meters and landed on the tip of a mountain of garbage, in full blinding daylight.

"We did it!" Sordovak cried. "We lived!"

"I can't see anything," Delinda said. "I can't see anything anywhere. It's too bright."

Sordovak started to exclaim his joy again, but he suddenly felt the garbage begin to give way beneath him, and he slid backward. It was as though some maw had opened to swallow everything up — he even heard its growl somewhere beneath him: a sort of metallic howling shriek that wound up tight and maintained an intensity of violence he thought he'd only encounter in his nightmares.

When at last he could see with his glare-blinded eyes, he was on his back sliding headfirst toward something that looked like an immense silver-barred grill, and when his eyes adjusted a little more, he saw the razor-edged row of hooks that rose from between the bars of the grill and then hooked downward, ripping cans into thin ribbons, shattering glass, and . . . there was George gliding into the masticator with a serenity available only to the dead. Sordovak didn't have to see any more.

He flopped over on his stomach and got his feet beneath him and began

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scrabbling wildly toward the top.

"I'm ordinary," he was thinking. "I'm too ordinary to be here, I'm too ordinary for this to be happening to me!"

He made some progress upward, but only after it seemed he had pushed several tons of garbage behind him . . . then he remembered Delinda. He screamed her name, and over the grinding of metal and the shattering of glass, he heard her answer from behind him, somewhere down the slope.

She too struggled through the cascading garbage, the hooks snapping down at her heels. Sordovak considered how long it had taken him to plow a quarter of the way to the top of the heap and if he'd have enough strength to do it again.

"Oh, crap," he said and jounced down to Delinda, stopping just above her and pulling her half a meter higher up the slope.

This was the first time he'd seen her since he had thrown her out of his condo. She was scaly with dirt and sweat, her hair stuck out of her head stiff as some kind of lightning-struck wad of wire, and her eyes were white with the purest horror. But she was more beautiful than words. She was more than beautiful. He didn't know why just then, but he knew it was true.

By her gritty hand he pulled her up along behind him. "This way," he called over his shoulder. "It should be easier if we circle upward instead of try to climb straight out. Slower but it should work. Kind of like talking to someone."

The circled the slope of the downward shifting landslide of garbage until they reached the summit, where they could easefully escape downhill. In twenty minutes they were there, their ankles and lower legs bleeding from the slash of ragged metal edges and broken glass. Around them lay acres of mounded multicolored trash, the rows of sweepers waiting to empty their bellies of refuse, and the empty ones scurrying away. Beyond the sweepers rose the brown skyline of Mantis City. Never had its smog-stained buildings looked so good. Never had the smoky sky looked as beautiful as it did now.

"What're you going to do now?" Delinda asked him as she tried to press her hair down.

"Go back to my condo, I guess." He sucked his cheek and spit out some small brown thing that had got in his mouth during the climb up. "What about you? You have anyplace to go?"

"I do but I don't want to go there." She dropped her hands to her sides, giving up on her hair. "I don't know what I'll do. I've probably lost my job by now."

"Want to come with me?"

"You think I want to go through that scene with you again? I don't know how you can live in that hole. The only difference between it and that sweeper is the amount of dirt."

Sordovak considered that.

"Someday you're going to wire yourself up to that thing and you won't ever come out. The new tenant'll dump your body out in the street like someone did with George, and you won't even know it. You'll be in that thing diddling some little part of yourself till someone turns off the switch." She hunched up her shoulders and then dropped them. "Who knows? Maybe you'll think you've died and gone to heaven. What with this place we have to live in, maybe you'll be the lucky one."

Sordovak turned his face up to the sunlight filaments. It was hot. It felt good.

"I want you to come back to my condo with me," he said. "I want you to do some art work with my Autolab. Make something useless out of it."

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She looked carefully at his face. "You look awful," she said.

"You look like hell yourself," he said. "Just like the rest of this place, Mantis City — all of it. We live in a hell."

"Beautiful, isn't it?" she said.

"All of it, and you, yes."

They waded through the garbage for an hour on their way out. The clear light delineated the gaudy color of every discarded can and gleamed in the shape of every empty bottle. ▮▮

Wayne Wightman

On a year's leave from his duties as a creative writing instructor, Wayne Wightman has been busy applying his theories to the writing of science fiction short stories and novels, as well as preparing a textbook. We have presented two of his tales prior to this one, "The White Ones" (November, 1979 *Amazing*) and "Do Unto Others" (February, 1980 *Amazing*), plus we will feature his novel "Metamind" in an upcoming issue of *Amazing*. He sends us these additional biographical notes:

I used to want to be an Indian. Then I wanted to be a magician. Then an astronomer. Then I got to the age where I just wanted to get through all this in one piece. Finally I got sophisticated and wanted to be who I was — it took me a few years to get out of that trap. So, about a year ago, as I was examining my life over a glass of beer, I decided there was only one thing I could logically become: a writer of science fiction.

Fortunately, I had been writing for the previous fifteen years and had a notebook full of ideas to draw on. Thirty-seven rejections later, I hit the Big One ("The White Ones," *Amazing*, Nov. '79). Persistence paid off, but it made me older.

At this point I wish to say that writing personal information about myself is very difficult. I don't have any idea what you, the reader of this page in this magazine, would find interesting about me. I'm tempted to write: "I hang around and write stories" and let it go at that. I'm probably a lot like you — I worry about what things cost. I like warm days after winter, and I think I'm probably not making the most of my time.

I am 5'-10", have dark hair, and live in the middle of California with five stray animals who consider me their friend.

WHY WE CHOSE THIS STORY

Whether plugging into the tube or sniffing up alternate realities, many people, like Sordovak, attempt to escape the messy stuff of the real world. They also may succeed in missing those particular joys attainable only by engaging in the struggle of life — i.e., by wading through a lot of garbage to get at what is really worthwhile. Wightman delivers this simple truth in a wacky future where our worst tendencies are carried to hopefully, zany extremes. You laugh at Sordovak as he gets his comeuppance, and perhaps shed a tear of recognition at the end where, transformed, he can joyfully embrace reality with all its imperfections. All of this makes for a thoroughly wonderful read.

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Observations on Overkill

ROPE THE

by Lawrence C. Connolly

It was late.

Marty slid two fresh cartridges into the shotgun.

It was time for him and Rick to make some money.

THE OBSERVER had been on Earth three weeks.

He found it backward, but he didn't mind.

His home while on Earth was a small control center in the bowels of a lifesize human simular.

He was the simular's brain, and there were times when he forgot who he was and thought he was human — which wasn't much of a problem. Everything was pretty routine.

Three more weeks and he'd sell the store to the first buyer and head home again, the simular's recording system packed full of dull information on the alien culture.

There wasn't much glamour to being an Observer, but it was easy.

And that suited him just fine.

THEIR PATHS crossed shortly after two a.m. — just within the city limits of Carson, Pennsylvania.

Marty and Rick sped through a flashing red light at the intersection of Cedar and Hamilton Avenue. Two thousand feet ahead, another intersection waited.

It was an intersection unmarked by flashing lights or road signs.

MARTY HELD the sawed-off shotgun's stock against his hip, its short metal barrel growing warm in his sweaty grip. The clouded gray eyes across the counter stared at Marty's pelvis, looking down the hacksawed barrel, while Rick searched behind the counter for a night-safe.

Marty wished he would hurry.

There were things in life more important than money; Marty realized that even though Rick didn't, and Rick's procrastination was adding to an already

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disastrous headache.

It had been a particularly rough day, the kind that made patience a scarce commodity come night. It started early that afternoon at breakfast, when the blond waitress at Delany's Diner forgot the extra sugar in his coffee. The pain started then, beginning in the temples and crashing together behind his eyes in sharp metallic thumps. It was so bad now that he had trouble moving his eyes. They squeaked in their sockets when he blinked. Rick said it was his imagination, but Rick didn't know anything but money anyway.

"All right, old man," said Rick, standing up behind the counter. "Where's it at?"

The old man's mouth was dry, and it clicked when it opened. "There isn't one," he said.

Rick looked at Marty and the black hole in the gun barrel and decided to move away from the counter. Once again, he began wishing he could get along without the crazy kid with the gun, but he knew what happened to people who let their faces become known, and, of all the ways to assure anonymity, Marty's way was the surest. Money never did anyone much good on death row.

The store's front wall was all glass plastered over with *Under New Management* signs. Most faced the outside, but one large red and white one was turned to face the counter. Rick passed it, reading:

Tommy's Superette — Grand Opening — We Never Close.

Rick turned to the old man.

"You Tommy?" he asked.

The old man nodded.

Rick grinned. "Well, look here, Tommy. When you open an all-nighter in Carson, you've got to have a safe."

"Let's just clean out the register and beat it, Rick," said Marty.

Rick passed behind Marty. "My friend," he said, "likes to shoot things."

The old man just stared down the barrel.

Rick fell against the bread display, running fat fingers through disheveled hair, exasperated. "Show us what's in the drawer," he said.

The old man rang *No Sale* and pulled the tray from the drawer's bottom where the large bills were kept. The green hit the counter like scattering leaves, fluttering in the air-conditioned breeze.

"Bag it," said Rick.

The old man cracked the bag open in the air, and Rick crossed to the huge glass doors. With all the paper there wasn't a chance of anyone who was driving down Cedar Avenue getting a look inside. The old man had certainly set himself up as easy prey. Folks said he was from out of town. He'd have to be. No

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one who knew Carson would open an all-nighter like this anywhere near the city.

Rick cracked the door, and the hot August air blew like devil's breath into the air-conditioned cool. The small parking lot stretched away to its Cedar Avenue entrance, and the yellow light from overhead lamps cut the two a.m. smog from the coke ovens by the river. By the door, Marty's red Ford sat rusting on bald tires. A few moments and it'd be taking them to Delany's Diner and then home. That would be nice. Rick rubbed his eyes and shut the door.

The full bag rested on the counter. Rick took it. It fit well into the hollow of his arm.

"Get it over with, Marty," said Rick. "I don't think he's going to tell us about the safe."

"Honest, boys, I . . ."

"Turn around and face the cigarettes," snapped Marty.

The old man turned, facing the indifferent wall of surgeon general warnings.

"You don't have to worry about me talking," stammered the old man. "If anyone asks about the money, I'll just say I lost it. I'm like that, you know, can't remember a thing unless I write it . . ."

"Do it, Marty."

"My God, please!"

Rick saw the wildness grow in Marty's eyes and turned away.

The crack of both barrels echoed off the papered glass, and the wood stock rammed hard into Marty's hip.

The old man gasped, hitting the cigarettes, sinking to the floor like a cracked melon.

THE SHOT had torn through the false human's near empty chest, sending it to the floor with a convincing thud.

Below the waist, cupped within the control center, the Observer pulled his head and six arms from the sensor sheaths.

He expected the pain to leave — it didn't.

He had feared the blast, as though the gun barrel had been aimed at his own chest. And, through it all, the killers had seemed so casual that it almost made him want to —

He tried thinking of home.

In the cooler, behind the racks of Dr. Pepper bottles and cottage cheese containers, the transfer point waited. He need only wait until the killers were gone. He could walk the simulated human through the transfer point and be a thousand lightyears from Earth faster than —

It was no good. The smaller human's blazing eyes kept coming back to him — *Turn around and face the cigarettes.*

No!

He couldn't let it get to him. The penalties for breaking the Observer's Code were severe. If the Elders found out —

But they wouldn't.

He could jam the recorder; say it was damaged from the shot's impact. He could make it look convincing — they'd never question. And if they did, could anything they did compare with what he'd felt when the gun went off?

He slid his head and arms back into the sensor sheaths, feeling himself becoming human again.

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The simular had held up well under the blast; a slight tremor in the left arm was all he noticed, but he knew there'd be more — things he wouldn't notice damaged until he needed them. He'd have to make it swift and merciless. And that suited him fine.

Carefully, quietly, he pushed the cold white hands off the dirty gray floor.

THE GUN blast echoed through the small store. Rick looked away until the thud on the floor behind the counter told him it was all right to turn around. He passed Marty and the smoking barrels, heading for the rear of the store.

"Aren't we going?" asked Marty, his eyebrows forming a pyramid on his wrinkled forehead.

"Not until I've looked for that safe."

The store was small, with no more than four aisles on each side of the counter. The back wall was a large display cooler with racks of soft drinks and dairy goods keeping cool behind thick glass doors. Rick paused, pressing his hands and face to the chilled glass. "There's a lot of storage space behind those racks," he said. "You look in there, Marty. I'll check this back room."

Marty didn't feel like protesting. He watched Rick turn into the small room in the store's rear corner. He waited a few moments, then went on toward the room after Rick. He'd tell Rick he'd looked and found nothing. Rick could walk into that cold dark refrigerator himself if he didn't believe it. Marty'd done his work for the night.

He was almost to the corner room when he heard something move by the counter.

A few meters away, out of sight in the small room, Rick heard nothing. He stood in the center of what looked like a small makeshift office. Empty crates and boxes stood stacked against three of the walls, and a bare bulb hung from the low ceiling. A night deposit bag lay open on a small metal desk. It was empty. When he looked up, Marty's welt splotched face stared back from the office door.

"Find something?" Rick asked.

Marty looked sick. Rick walked out of the office. Over Marty's shoulder, he saw the old man turning the lock in the doors.

"I'm scared, Rick," said Marty, feeling the knot behind his eyes doubling, tightening. The empty gun looked almost limp in his shaking hands. The lion was a lamb without his teeth.

"Of a wounded old man?" asked Rick.

"But, Rick, he's not even bleeding."

Rick looked at the keys, still swinging in the door, and at the torn stringbean old man standing in the way. It would be simple to walk past him and unlock the door. There wasn't much a wounded old fart like that could do to stop a guy like Rick. Being alive didn't make him Superman.

Rick had heard stories of people taking it in the chest and coming out of it alive. Sometimes bullets went right through people without hitting anything vital. It was luck, and what a shame it had to be wasted on the old man, because it just meant Marty was going to have to ventilate his ribcage again after reloading the shotgun with shells from the car's glove-compartment. And that had better not take much longer, thought Rick. He had something nice waiting for him at Delany's, and she wasn't the type to be left waiting all night. Carson was

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full of bums on the make, and Delany's wasn't exactly the place to avoid them.

He had the paper bag tucked under his jacket and was almost to the door when something grabbed him from behind.

The old man?

He braced against the unexpected force. The bag fell from under his jacket. It felt like a crane had hooked onto his back collar. He was going up.

He saw the cracks in the ceiling, then felt himself spinning, flying past soap and cereal boxes, and spilling into a stack of toilet paper. The stack collapsed, and he struck the floor — hard. His right arm twisted under. Something popped in his shoulder. When he looked up, the old man was standing over him, holding Marty's gun by its short barrel like a club.

Marty sat dumbfounded on the floor by the cooler, his lips running red where the old man had hit him. It hadn't been much of a fight. Marty had given up the gun after the first blow. He now sat like a statue, legs straight out on the floor in front of him, his eyes glassy as wet marbles. He didn't seem to be looking at anything in the store.

Rick's shoulder felt like someone had leaned on it with an air-hammer, and the pain filled his eyes, sending tears down the side of his face. One part of his mind was hoping it didn't look like he was crying — another part was looking up into the wrinkled face above the ruptured chest (why wasn't it leaking blood?) and bracing for the gun's skull crushing impact.

Marty continued to stare vacantly from his seat before the cooler.

There was a four pronged propellor blade at the base of his skull, and it was spinning full speed; puree-liquefy, turning his gray matter to whipped mush. The pain was so far beyond description that his nervous system was having trouble relaying the sensation. He sat, his head flat against the cooler door, unable to make sense of the sudden change of events going on around him. Red flashers were going off behind his eyes.

Distant memories splashed against his forebrain; chunks coughed up from his ill mind.

He thought of parochial school.

Toward the end of each school year, hornets would nest in the wooded side of the old school building, and, for the day that it took Father Larkin to get around to burning them out, there was no want of excitement in the school yard.

Recess was held just after lunch on a large asphalt playground on the highway side of the school. A fat white line bisected the lot, separating the uniformed girls from the sport-jacketed boys. Saint Joseph nuns, their habits flowing in the late spring breeze like shadowy wings on death angels, surveyed the lot with chiseled stone faces.

There was no running. Anybody caught moving faster than a dull walk got a metal-edged ruler across the fingernails. Shouting or laughing was forbidden.

All winter long the children had stood, keeping to their own sides of the white line, hands in pockets or gloves, feet pacing, lips drawn across faces in somber blue lines. But that was over. It was almost summer. The weather was warm. There were only a few days left. And on the school's wooded side there were hornets.

What-cha got, Marty?

Hey, guys, look what Marty's got.

It's just an ol' Peter Pan jar.

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Wow, what's that inside?
How'd you get it?
Sure is a big one.
Hey, guys, keep it down. Sister's looking.

On a hot June afternoon, with only a week of recesses left before the freedom of summer, a boy with a hornet in a jar could be king. All winter he'd dodged their iceballs, but anyone could dip snowballs in ice water. It took someone special to catch a hornet.

You aren't letting him out here, are you, Marty?

He loved teasing them, popping the lid and snapping it back before the buzzing madness could fly out stinging. He'd laugh at them backing away, afraid of running in case a nun was watching. Then he'd shake the jar, getting the hornet good and mad, and do it again.

But it was all just warm up — cartoons before the movie, and he waited until everyone was just about peeing themselves over the forbidden danger before he brought out the surprise.

There was an air hole punched in the lid, and in Marty's pocket was a bit of thread tied into a noose. Facing the highway, their backs to the patrolling habits, a small band of breathless boys watched while Marty slipped the thread through the hole, bobbing the noose up and down, waiting to catch the hornet at rest near the bottom.

Marty was the best hornet roper in Carson.

He waited for the hornet to calm a bit before unscrewing the lid. This time he let it fly out, pulling the long thread after it. Marty's finger was looped around the other end, and it was something to see the little punk kid walking over the fat white line that marked the end of the boy's territory — the beginning of the girl's. Those starched uniforms could sure move when they had to, alive with forbidden motion, rosy lips screaming bloody murder.

And even Mother Superior wouldn't lay hands on him so long as he held that thread — which wasn't all that long. The hornet figured things out before long, and that was the time to let go and run like hell.

When Mother Superior caught up with him, things stopped being fun. She had an office down one of the school's darker corridors. It was decorated with various scenes of Christ undergoing bizarre agony. Mother Superior's objective during their sessions seemed to be to match Marty's agony to Christ's.

Marty wasn't sure if that was when the headaches started, but it was certainly his earliest recollection of them being bad enough to put him out of his head.

After Mother Superior beat him up, she made a phone call to his father. When Marty got home, his father beat him up. The next day the hornets were gone, and he was just a dumb punk kid again. After school, the other kids beat him up.

And that's what life was all about.

So long as you were dangerous, nobody hurt you.

Now, sitting on the superette floor, Marty felt anything but dangerous. When he looked down, he could see his still swelling lip sticking out like a duck mouth, and the head pains were coming in waves — sending breakers crashing against his temples every two or three seconds. Between the spasms were moments of lesser pain, and during those he was able to look around — able to think things through. It was like carrying on a conversation next to the Carson fire whistle.

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Thought would flow for only a few moments before being interrupted by blaring pain.

The old man's still holding the gun over Rick's head, he thought to himself. *They're talking, but* — flashing red pain — *not going well for Rick.*

They're ignoring me. Guess they've figured I've — charliehorse behind the eyes — *I've got to get up. That pain's driving me crazy.*

Those can-openers hanging on that pegboard, I wonder if they're the kind with corkscrews —

He pushed himself off the floor, quietly, bracing for the next flash of brain-fire.

It came, and the room went fuzzy. He steadied himself on the cooler door till it passed, then moved on.

He took a can-opener from a hook (it was the right kind, all right), set it in his palm, and made a fist with the twisting metal screw sticking through his fingers.

He sighted a spot on the old man's spine between the shoulder blades. He struck, putting the full force of his slight weight into the lunge.

The head pain flashed again, and he felt the two of them toppling, falling over Rick, slamming into the paper covered windows along the store front. The gun skidded across the floor. Both Marty and the old man grabbed for it, sliding like pro linemen after a fumbled football. Marty caught it, and swung the stock up into the man's chin. The old man fell back, and Rick caught him — holding him while Marty brought the gun down hard between unflinching eyes. The eyes kept staring. Marty pulled back, and hit him again.

And again.

And again.

Rick held on with his good arm tight around the old man's neck. When he was sure the fight was gone from the battered face, he let go.

The head hit the floor.

Marty continued pounding, pausing every few seconds to control explosions in his own brain.

Rick turned away — looking at the doors, and the cracks between the paper signs where the night peeked through from outside. It was going to take a lot of tumbling in the sack with Patty to burn away this night's tensions. He was wondering if he dared tell her where all his money came from, when he saw something that made him want to puke.

Someone was outside, watching through the spaces between the signs.

"Marty!"

Rick grabbed his hand, halting total destruction of the old man's face.

Marty turned.

There was no one at the window, only the muffled sound of heels in the night.

Marty held the gun to his chest.

"Someone saw us, Rick."

Rick thought Marty sounded like a scared child caught mid-way through some forbidden act. His face and neck were splotched red, and his eyes looked ready to fly from their sockets.

He jumped for the door, still hugging the empty gun, and, twisting the keys in the lock, burst into the August night. A few meters away, under the yellow glow of parking lot lights, a car door slammed.

A woman's face glared at him behind the glass.

Running for his own car, Marty heard her grinding the engine. It sputtered before exploding to life.

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He pulled open his Ford's door and stabbed the stud on the glove compartment. The box inside overturned. Shells rattled onto the floor.

He put the gun on his knee and opened the chamber. The spent shells slipped out. He threw them on the ground, snatching two replacements from the floor. They slid into place, and he snapped the gun together again.

Behind him, the woman's car screeched onto Cedar Avenue, its blazing taillights swallowed up by the thickening smog.

Inside the store, Rick was using his good arm to stuff spilled money back into the paper bag, when he heard something moving by the doors.

"Marty?" he asked.

No answer.

He was still looking at the floor, when the shoe slammed into his back, catching him just below the neck. Gray linoleum raced up, embracing his face, crushing his nose with a bolt of pain that spread over his face like burning acid. He went rigid, and a hard jab in the ribs spun him on his back. The old man towered over him, a gorge-like crack running the length of his face — a crack as blood free as the hole in his chest.

Rick heard himself asking, "What the hell are you?" The words tasted salty with blood from his flattened nose.

The old man unhitched his belt and slid it through the loops with one powerful pull. He passed the notched end back through the buckle and slipped the resulting noose over Rick's throbbing head.

Rick tried getting up, moving away, but the pain lay on his face like a thousand-pound weight, holding him in place.

The old man pulled the noose tight, and Rick felt the extra pressure of trapped blood pounding in his temples, squirting from his broken nose. He braced for the second jerk and the sweet release of unconsciousness, when something ripped the air above, sending the old man's head flying from its shoulders.

Marty, gripping the smoking gun, plowed into the old man's back, and the headless body went sprawling against the bread racks. Marty watched as the withered hands spread over the Wonder Bread, steadying the headless body, feeling its way to the back of the store.

Rick summoned his remaining strength and, with Marty's help, sat up. He didn't want to turn around to find out what the invincible store clerk was doing. He could see Marty reloading, and that was enough.

EVERYTHING WAS going at once.

He was groping blind through a rain of flying matter that was tearing the sumular to shreads.

He pulled himself from the sensor sheaths.

Revenge would have to wait. It was his own existence he was fighting for now.

He pressed a small three fingered hand over the escape hatch, wondering how long he could last breathing the unfiltered air.

There wasn't much choice. The simular was dead — there was no way it would make it to the transfer point, and to leave it behind for the natives to puzzle over was out of the question.

He fingered the destruct mechanism — the simple safeguard that would fuse the simular into near nothingness while bringing little damage to the immediate surroundings.

He set the timer.

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Turn around and face the cigarettes.

Of course, there were ways to enlarge the area of destruction. Not all Observers knew about them.

But he'd been in the trade a while.

And he was good with his hands.

When he finished, he popped the hatch to the outside and ran down the simular's leg — running on six trembling hands to the transfer point in the cooler.

IT HAD been building gradually for a long time, possibly all his life.

Like the middle aged woman who suddenly realizes her age while watching her youngest child leave home for the last time, Marty looked at the torn mess on the floor (how many times had it been?) and realized he wasn't in control any longer. It was as though the pain crashing on his temples had a consciousness of its own — thinking for him, directing him.

From far away, ringing across Carson's narrow dipping streets came the muted whine of sirens.

Marty realized Rick was tugging at his arm.

"Come on, Marty," he was saying. "That lady's sending the cops."

Video Rangers, thought Marty. When he was younger, and his head was small enough, he used to put empty Mother's Oats boxes over it, pretending it was a Captain Video space helmet. Sometimes he'd leave it on so long, his mother would yell for him to take it off, her voice coming muffled through the cardboard — sounding far away — just as Rick's did now.

"But what if he's not dead?" he heard himself asking, his voice thundering back into his ears. *Yes,* he thought, *it's exactly like having an oatmeal box on the head.*

"Who's he going to squeal to without a head?" said Rick. "Look, he's crapping his pants. Dead people always do that."

Any minute now. It was coming, he knew it. The box would be wiped from his head, and there would be the barber strap waiting to strop his backside. He felt like a snow heavy mountain before the avalanche — like the calm Kansas sky before the twister. He watched through shadowy slits in curved cardboard while the lump rolled down the dead man's inseam, and he knew he was about to leave the safety of the oatmeal box. Madness was just on the other side.

"Let's go, Marty."

He watched it roll past the knee and on to the foot. It exited by the ankle — long and black, scurrying into the next aisle on six spindly legs.

It was the biggest one Marty had ever seen.

Rick turned from the open door in time to see Marty turn down the aisle. "What the hell you doing, Marty?"

Marty's awestruck voice floated over the Coffee-Mate jars. "That guy had a hornet up his ass."

Rick didn't feel like discussing it. If anyone had a hornet up his ass it was Marty, and Rick wasn't in the mood for humoring him — not this time. If Marty wanted to stay around and say "Hi" to the police, that was his business. As for himself . . .

"I'm leaving, Marty."

"Hey, Rick. You've got to take a look . . ."

The glass door swung back, biting off Marty's words with silvery steel lips.

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Rick was on the outside, running toward the old Ford.

Marty had left the passenger side door open, and red plastic shells lay scattered about it, their brilliance faded to a dirty orange in the misty yellow light. Rick let them alone. Let Marty explain them. He threw the bag into the back seat and dove behind the wheel. He had to reach to start the ignition with his right hand, kicking the gas with a heavy boot while he yanked the PRNDLL into R.

He spun about, fishtailing to the entrance of Cedar Avenue, and slammed head on into the flashing headlights of the Carson Chief of Police.

Marty could hear the commotion growing outside. People were shouting over the blare of sirens and, all around, tires seemed to be screeching — stopping just outside.

Marty watched the hornet running awkwardly down the aisle toward the cooler.

The oatmeal box was gone. The aisle stretched before him as clear as autumn dawn. His mind swam with clarity. Everything was so simple.

Marty knew what he needed.

With a hornet that size, even the Carson Police would have to leave him alone.

THE OBSERVER stopped before the towering glass doors. Huge green sevens mocked him from pop cans on the other side.

Heavy foot falls padded down the aisle behind him — coming closer.

He pried his slender arms under a door's rubber seal and pulled. It opened, spilling cooler air over his face and out across the floor. The trick would be to slip through without being crushed as the door swung back after he let go.

He needed a wedge — anything to keep the door open. But there wasn't time.

The human was right behind him.

In the other aisle, the destruct timer hummed quietly to itself.

There was less than one minute remaining.

MARTY'S JACKET fit like a black snake skin, and it hissed over his slender arms as he pulled it off. The hornet was trying to squeeze into the cooler. It turned, looking at him with eyes like big amber saucers. They fixed on him, sizing him up with cat-like pupils before turning away from the heavy door.

Marty threw the jacket. It flew to the floor, catching the last whiffs of cooler air like a pregnant sail, and fell over the hornet. Marty jumped on it, spreading arms out along the edges, trapping it . . .

Almost.

There was a gap by the collar. Marty moved his right arm to block it, leaving the side unsecured. The hornet squeezed through, ran a few meters back up the aisle, and dove between the red and white Special K boxes lining the bottom shelf.

DARKNESS GAVE the illusion of safety — like being back in the control center, hidden where no one could touch him.

He scurried back, far as he could, until two of his hands fell on a low rise at the back of the shelf. Smells of moldy cheese.

He backed away.

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His eyes were adjusting to the dark, but he didn't need them to remember the problem the store had with rats — he'd set the traps a few weeks before to comply with a smug-health inspector's wishes.

He could see it now, dimly through thick shadows — the flat wooden slab with its unsprung wire jaw held taut against a thick coiled spring.

And behind him came the crash of flying boxes, set in motion by the human's groping hands.

The destruct timer hummed.

There were less than thirty seconds remaining.

Marty shoved his hand deep toward the rear of the shelf. His fingers closed on something hard.

Something harder closed on his fingers.

The pain started at his knuckles and raced up his arm, sharp tremors screaming through raw nerves.

He drew back his hand. Blood gushed from the stumps at his first and second knuckles, spraying the pristine red and white cereal boxes, dripping to the floor in spreading pools.

The damn thing had stung him.

Boots scraped the pavement outside. Someone opened the door. Voices poured in. They were asking Rick questions. Rick wasn't answering.

The hornet ran from the shelf (why the hell didn't it fly — he'd never be able to hold it over his head on a string if it didn't fly) and ran back toward the cooler.

Marty held his leaking hand to his chest, took the shotgun in his good hand, and ran after it.

The voices rounded the top of the aisle.

Marty turned, facing four Carson policemen, legs apart, pistols at arms length.

Hold it right there, mister.

Marty spun about, turning his back on them. The hornet was at the cooler door again, trying to squeeze through. He had to get them to see it — had to get them to see it was his.

A bullet cut the air above Marty's head, shattering a hole in the top of the cooler door. The door slammed under the impact, nearly ripping off the hornet's head.

Marty turned and leveled his gun at them. They were trying to kill it.

Just a warning, mister. Now drop that gun and put your hands on the cooler.

Marty couldn't tell which one was talking. They all looked the same with their short cropped hair and anthracite eyes, staring at him with envy and hate, waiting for Father Larkin to burn out the hornets so they could all slip back into their proper roles.

Marty stared back at them — through the aisle, through the years, through the pain that had so slowly become madness — then he let them have it.

Both barrels.

He wasn't good at shooting with his left hand, and the shot went wild, catching the policeman on the right in the shoulder, knocking him backwards into the front window.

The others fired.

Marty hit the cooler glass with a resounding thud, and the bullets passed through him, shattering the window. Pop bottles split in two, spilling cold sweet-

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ness down over his face, into his mouth — the sweet taste of death and release. The headache was leaving now.

Cold darkness settled around him.

Mother Superior was wrong. There was nothing on the other side. Only the sweet taste of release.

GLASS LAY broken on the floor, and the cool air flowed from the broken door, mingling with the blood and Faygo.

The Observer pulled himself up on the shoulder that had once belonged to Marty (it now belonged to the coroner) and slipped over the jagged glass into the cooler.

The policemen, bending over the wounded officer, didn't see a thing.

At the cooler's far corner, the transfer point waited. He ran to it, and it swallowed him up.

The destruct timer stopped humming.

There were no seconds remaining.

EIGHT MILES north, up the meandering curves of the muddy Monongahela River, Pittsburgh sat under a thick windless sky. The last bars had closed and, with the exception of certain sections of Oakland, the streets were nearly empty. PAT busses rattled empty over cobblestone streets — heading from here to there in no particular hurry.

When it came, few people saw it.

At a quarter to three that morning, the southern sky went ablaze with the kind of sunset only the thick skies of western Pennsylvania can offer.

Only it wasn't sunset.

It was a quarter to three, and only a few bus drivers and Pitt students on the streets of Oakland saw it. They ran home, waking up room-mates, husbands, wives, parents — anyone who would listen — and talked about how beautiful it was.

And they talked into the night, stopping only when the first reports came over the late night talk shows.

That was when they found out what had happened.

That was when they found out there was no longer a Carson, Pennsylvania.

Lawrence C. Connolly

I live in Pittsburgh's east section, where the universities are and the parks go mad with color in October, with a wife who has no idea how beautiful she is.

I am a printer who is also a writer, and have no complaints. I work in a fine-shop outside Pittsburgh, and have a story in the May, 1980 *Amazing Stories* (*Cockroaches*).

Occasionally I work late.

When the lights in the front of the print shop go out and the street light half a block away flickers yellow over the empty store fronts, I find myself checking the lock on the door more than is necessary — rattling the hinges, jingling the keys from my pocket, making sure no one can get in.

Usually I'm gone by six-thirty.

It's the all night market people who have it rough. Their doors never close.

A number of things went into this story. Fear, the kind that is basic to everyone — the kind that knots the stomach when it's night and the man at the door is wearing a

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ski mask, and you know it's August and the nearest slope won't open for four months. On television and in comic books there are people who cope with fear — they're not the everymen of life. They're supermen. For my story I wanted a superman. A little old store clerk who refused to die. But I wanted him to know fear. Fear is stronger than pain — it can make even a superman seek revenge.

Rope the Hornet is the kind of story I like reading now and then — bold and fast; a running story with little fat and much muscle. That, at least, is what I was aiming for.

WHY WE CHOSE THIS STORY

This fast-paced adventure offers not only a psychological study of a criminal mind at its peak of mischief, but also a surprising evaluation of how an alien mind might react when put to the test by its unwitting hosts. In his bio-sketch Connolly reveals the inspiration for this story; be sure to read it. As monstrous as the human criminals behave, the "Observer's" retaliation seems both indiscriminate as well as unfeeling — perhaps exactly the way an alien might respond.

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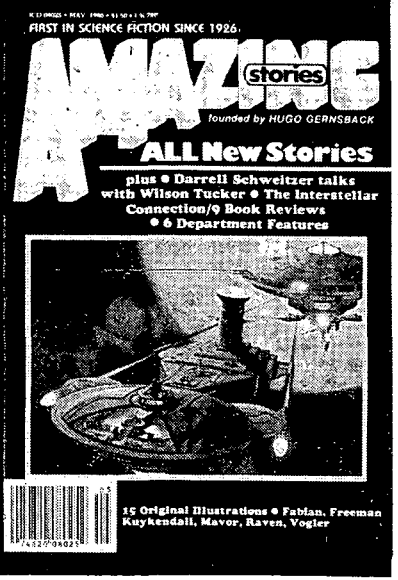
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Time Tripping, Talent & Teeth

A Visit with Lenny

by K. L. Jones

THE ROOM looked like somebody's attic. But not just anybody's attic. It was like the attic of an art collector with some interest in engineering. Canvasses, completed, half-completed and untouched lay scattered about. Models of structures and machines with unguessable functions lined the walls. A work bench pushed against the far wall held several palettes with the remains of various dried paints. Beside them lay brushes, assorted hammers and chisels.

The room was mostly bathed in shadows. A small area slightly off center stood in stark contrast to the rest of the room. Brilliant sunlight cast a circle in the area and in the center of that circle stood an easel. A short, dark bearded man stood by the easel. He held a brush in his left hand and there was a look of disgust on his face.

There was also a man in the shadows by the room's entrance. He wore a strange silver suit and he was waiting for the right moment to interrupt. It came when the man by the easel threw his brush to the floor and angrily moved away from the painting.

The man in the silver suit moved slowly and silently toward the center of the room.

"Bon jour, senor Leonardo," he said when he was sure the artist had seen him.

"What?"

There was a brief pause as both men stared at each other.

"Was that supposed to be Italian?"

The artist took two steps toward the man in the silver suit as he spoke. "Boy, you time travelers sure are lousy linguists."

"I beg your pardon," the man in the silver suit replied.

"That's better. Stick to English and we'll be able to communicate. Now what's on your mind?"

The man in the silver suit parted his lips as if to speak, but it was a while before any sounds came out.

"Uh," was the first utterance he managed.

"I am a very busy man," the artist spoke slowly, as if he were addressing a young child. "I do not have all day. What do you a want?"

The man in the silver suit spoke even slower, as if he were in fact an astonished child:

"You speak English?"

"Of course," the artist responded. "You English-speaking travelers are so poor at speaking in my language, and I get so many visits from you that I have learned *your* language."

"I'm not sure I've come to the right place," the man in the silver suit said.

"It depends on where you wanted to be. This is the city of Florence. But perhaps you are thinking more of when than where?"

The man in the silver suit stood silently.

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"The year is 1506. Does that ring a bell?"

"Yes," the man in the silver suit said reluctantly.

"Good. Now that we have settled the formalities, tell me what it is you want? An autographed sketch, perhaps?"

"You are Leonardo da Vinci?"

The small dark man bowed slightly and gestured outwardly with his hands: "I have that honor. Now tell me what you want."

"I'm looking for a fugitive from the Twenty-Third Century."

"As I said, I get many visits from the future. You can't expect me to remember everyone."

"You'd remember this one. He was a dwarf."

"A dwarf, you say," Leonardo stretched himself to add an inch or so to his stature. Why do you come to *me* looking for a dwarf?"

"We were told he was coming to visit you."

"And you believe that I, Leonardo da Vinci, am running a home for fugitive dwarfs?"

"If you will just let me explain. We are afraid that this man intends to introduce an anachronism into this time strata. His intent, we have been told, is to assist you in your efforts to create a means of flight. This man, whose name is Zachery Musta . . ."

"Wait. You say this dwarf's name was Musta."

"Yes."

"Oh," Leonardo said. "I didn't know you meant *that* dwarf."

"Then he has been here to see you?"

Leonardo chewed his lower lip thoughtfully. He ran his hands over his face.

"Yes. He was here."

"Did he give you anything?"

Again Leonardo chewed his lip before answering.

"Nothing," he said finally. "Now I really must get back to work."

He turned toward the easel.

The portrait glared at him. It was ugly, or so he thought. It was unfinished, perhaps unfinishable.

"Bah," Leonardo said.

He turned back to the silent figure in the silver suit.

"Is there something else?" he asked.

"Balloons," the man said, muttering under his breath. Then: "Are you sure Musta didn't give you any balloons?"

"Just why is a balloon so important?"

"Flying," the man in the silver suit said. "We believe that you have invented a flying machine."

"Am I crazy, or are you? This is Sixteenth Century Italy. There is no flying machine."

Da Vinci had spoken firmly, but there had been a hesitation before he answered.

"Are you sure," the man in the silver suit asked softly. "You, the great da Vinci have studied the anatomy of birds. You have made drawings . . ."

"How do you know this?"

The man in the silver suit smiled but said nothing.

"Just ideas. Mental playthings," Leonardo said. "Nothing more."

"Sure," the man in the silver suit said.

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Leonardo knelt and picked up his brush from the floor. He wiped it on his shirt. Most of the dirt came off. He was satisfied.

"Just ideas," the man in the silver suit said. "Have you ever thought what would happen if man could fly?"

Leonardo dabbed his brush irritably against the painting that stood on the easel.

"Bah," he said in disgust.

"Mr. da Vinci, you are a genius. Your accomplishments will live through the ages . . . "

Turning from the portrait, Leonardo softened and said, "Please — call me Lenny. But what are you getting at?"

"What I am trying to say is that someday man will fly. Man will conquer the skies. But that day is not now. Do you know what terrible things will happen if the concept and the actuality of flight is introduced at this point in history?"

"No, do you?"

The man in the silver suit frowned.

"Eh, not really. I mean since it didn't happen in history, we don't know . . ."

"So what's the big deal?"

"Please, Lenny, just listen to me. We time troopers are charged with the responsibility of keeping history pure and unchanged. Nobody knows what terrible disasters will be caused by even the slightest deviation from the actual historic time scheme. That is why we can not let you invent a flying machine in this time strata."

Leonardo paused thoughtfully.

"MAESTRO, MAESTRO . . ."

The call came from below and was followed by the labored sound of someone seemingly falling *up* the stairs. The thuds of a body landing heavily on each step were followed by the sharper thud of wood on wood.

A tall young man huddling over a pair of crude crutches appeared in the doorway.

"Not now, Angelo. I have company," Leonardo said.

"Qui?"

The man on crutches moved passed the man in the silver suit. He steadied himself rockily and gave out with a rapid flood of what had to have been Italian. Leonardo answered in kind which prompted a response from Angelo complete with a rather fluent right handed gesture that ended with one of his crutches crashing to the floor.

"Madre mia," Leonardo said as he stooped to retrieve the crutch. He handed it to the younger man and spoke a short rapid sentence.

"Graci, maestro. Graci."

The man on the crutches turned and moved slowly and painfully back to the doorway. Again the sound of wood on wood and the heavier sound of a body making its way down the stairs. The sounds formed a rhythm that came to a stop and were followed by an unrhythmatic crash which was combined with a slightly high pitched squeal.

"Clumsy oaf," Leonardo said. Then turning back to the painting, he added: "Bah."

Again he threw the brush to the floor.

"Francisco del Giocondo wants the portrait of his wife. Bah, it is not done."

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He turned to the man in the silver suit.

"Now, in simple words. No philosophy. No preaching. What is it you want?"

"We want to take back the plans Musta gave you."

"What plans? Musta gave me no plans. All he did was draw a circle on the plans I had."

Leonardo moved across the room to the table.

"Wait," he said. "I'll show you."

He picked up a notebook and thumbed through it for several seconds. "Ah," he said. "Here."

He thrust the book toward the man in the silver suit who had followed him over to the table. The book was open to an illustration of a man-like figure with a bird-like superstructure imposed on it. From the center of the figure's back a huge circle had been roughly sketched in.

"Your runaway dwarf friend said we could fly with this sack if it were filled with hot air. But, I, Leonardo, tell you, it would not work."

"Yes," the man in the silver suit said. "You wouldn't mind if I took this page, would you?"

Leonardo grabbed the book from the man's hand.

"You want to take my work from me? I told you already, it will not work. Why do you want more?"

"Well, it's just that I have to be sure . . ."

"It will not work, I tell you. I, Leonardo, know that it will not work. It will not even be tried. I promise you that."

Angelo, Leonardo thought. The oaf. Maybe it would have worked if someone a little less clumsy . . .

Leonardo shook his head to clear it of the memories of his apprentice's screams. Fortunately it had not been a very high cliff.

"Ah," Leonardo said suddenly. "I tell you what. I will give you this page. I have other . . . But you must do me a favor."

"What?" the man in the silver suit asked.

"I want your advice. I want you to tell me what is wrong with that," he gestured back toward the easel. I need the aid of someone with a fresh vision."

The man in the silver suit moved to the easel.

"I like it," he said.

"Bah," Leonardo said. "It's wrong. Can't you see that? That is Madonna Elisabeth, the wife of Francisco del Ciocondo. And that man is driving me crazy. He keeps insisting I give him the painting. And I keep telling him it is not finished. A true artist needs time to work. Time to finish. That painting could be a masterpiece. If only he would leave me alone."

"How long have you been working on it?"

"Three years," Leonardo said. "But, you, of all people should realize that time is nothing . . ."

Leonardo moved beside the man in the silver suit.

"I like it," the man said.

"Bah," Leonardo said again. "Your taste is grotesque. Tell me something, give me any idea and the page is yours to take back. Say the first thing that comes into your head."

"Uh," the man in the silver suit said. He raised his right hand and slowly began to scratch his head. His lips were compressed in a half-thoughtful half-whimsical smile of concentration.

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"I don't know," he said finally. "Her teeth look kind of funny."

Leonardo studied the portrait.

"Her teeth look funny," he repeated the words slowly, softly. Then: "That's it! I will close her mouth!"

"Well . . ."

"Quiet. You have said enough. I am the genius."

He tore the page from the notebook and handed it to the man in the silver suit.

"Now please leave so that I may finally get this done."

He threw the notebook to the floor and retrieved his brush. With quick broad strokes he began to restructure the face on the canvass before him.

The man in the silver suit stood silently for a moment. Something about the painting was nagging at him. He'd seen it some place. He couldn't quite pin the thought down.

Holding the crumpled page from the notebook in his hand, the man in the silver suit turned. Slowly and silently he moved unnoticed into the shadows.

K. L. Jones

I was born Aug. 13, 1946 in Chicago and have lived here all of my life except for about a year and a half spent in the wilderness of Southern Illinois. I am married and have one son. I've been practicing law since 1971, working as a kind of public defender, mostly on the appellate level.

At about the same time I decided I was going to be a lawyer, I also decided that I was going to be a writer. It took a little longer, but I've had about a dozen stories published since 1977.

A while back you asked if I had any other stories planned about "The Man in the Silver Suit". Actually I had two in mind, but so far only one has gotten down on paper. I also saw Ted Piwowar's letter in *Amazing* requesting more stories about this character. I hope both you and he will like this one.

Some other things you might want to know about this story:

Da Vinci did spend three years working, on and off, on the Mona Lisa and apparently never was satisfied with it; also, I'm sure everybody knows about Da Vinci's design for a flying machine, but there is some support for the idea that he may really have tried it out. There is a rather cryptic entry in his notebook about an experiment to be carried out on Jan. 2, 1496. And there were rumors in 1510 that one of his assistants broke a leg in an attempt to fly.

The above facts, and whatever is historically accurate in this story, were gleaned from Will Durant's *The Renaissance.*

WHY WE CHOSE THIS STORY

The first story about "The Man in the Silver Suit" appeared in the August, 1979 issue of Amazing. *Describing an encounter between a time traveler and a rural American handyman, the piece drew a good deal of comment and even analysis way beyond anything the author intended. The encounter was the message, perfect in itself. In that tale and this, the contrast between the time trooper and his surroundings is funny and in both stories "The Man" leaves behind a memento of his visit. His job seems to be insuring that no one tampers with history, and yet, what if he hadn't mentioned those teeth? Good fun, he and Lenny.*

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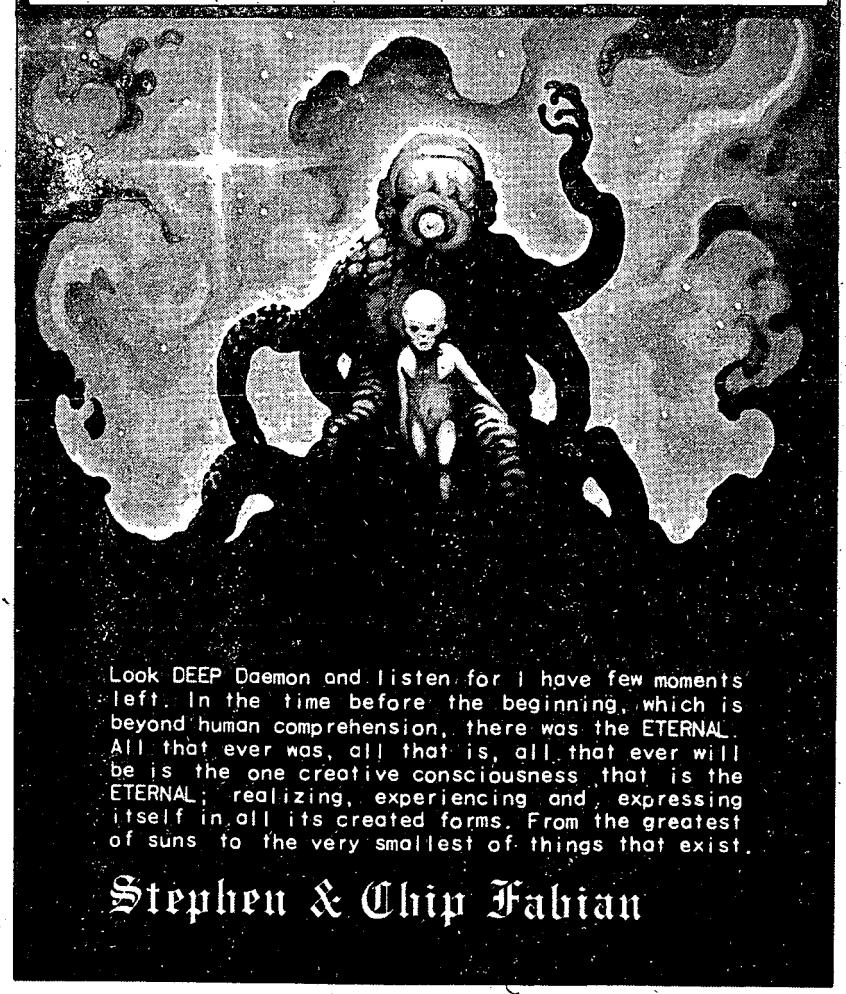
DAEMON



Look DEEP Daemon and listen for I have few moments left. In the time before the beginning, which is beyond human comprehension, there was the ETERNAL. All that ever was, all that is, all that ever will be is the one creative consciousness that is the ETERNAL; realizing, experiencing and expressing itself in all its created forms. From the greatest of suns to the very smallest of things that exist.

Stephen & Chip Fabian

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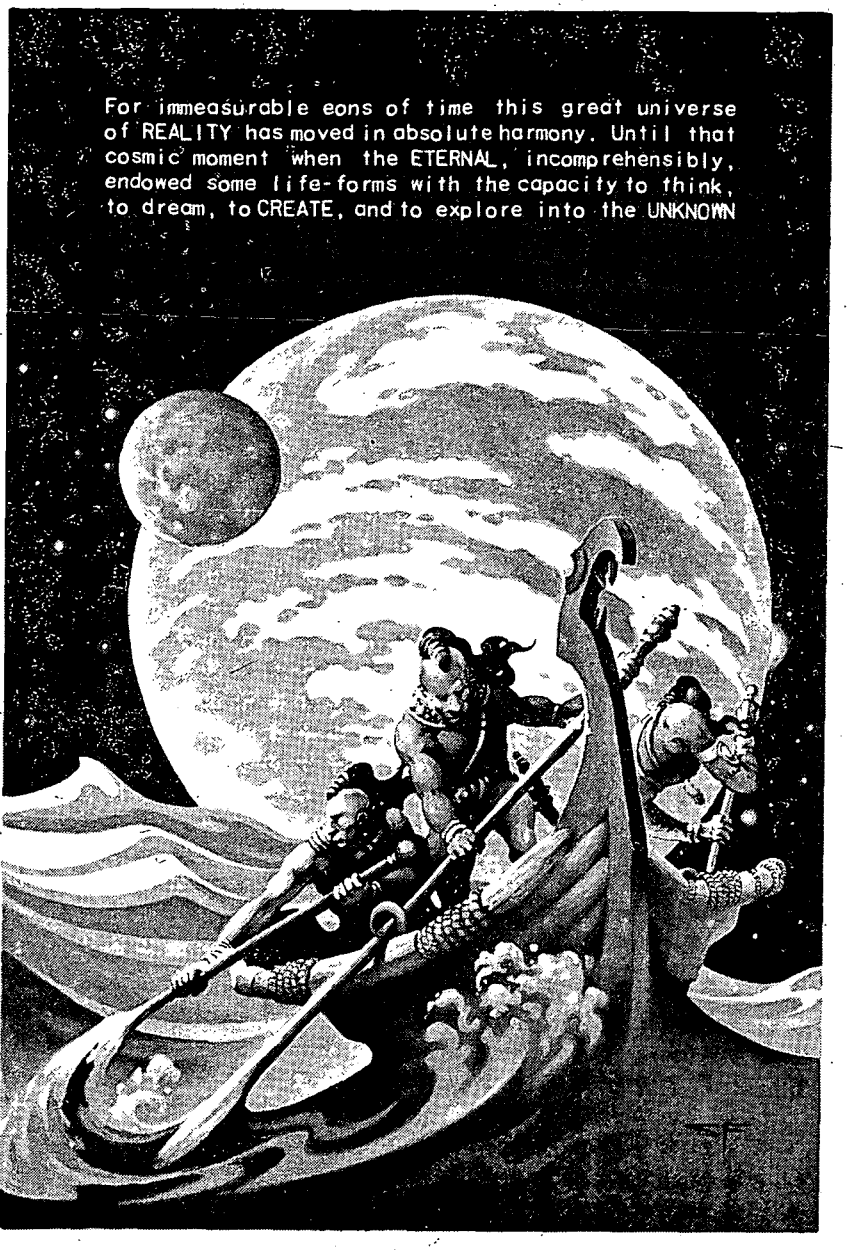
For immeasurable eons of time this great universe of REALITY has moved in absolute harmony. Until that cosmic moment when the ETERNAL, incomprehensibly, endowed some life-forms with the capacity to think, to dream, to CREATE, and to explore into the UNKNOWN

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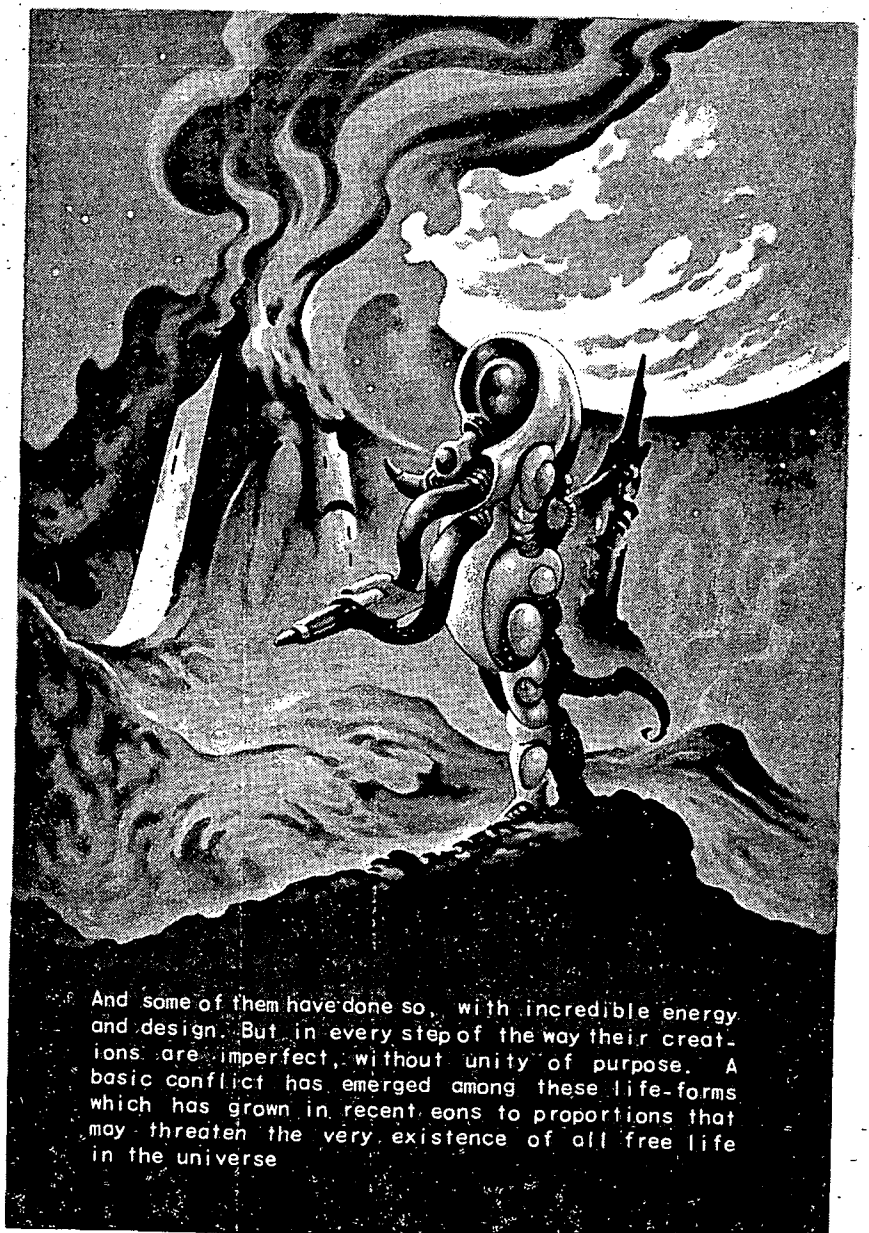
And some of them have done so, with incredible energy and design. But in every step of the way their creations are imperfect, without unity of purpose. A basic conflict has emerged among these life-forms which has grown in recent eons to proportions that may threaten the very existence of all free life in the universe

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Throughout the vast oceans of stars the dominant life-forms either struggle to move in harmony for the common good, or fight to achieve power and control over ALL, which may ultimately threaten even the ETERNAL. You have searched the world for adventure Daemon, but you will find it, beyond your wildest dreams, out among the stars! TAKE THE CHILD'S HAND!

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A Cure for No Known Disease

The COMPROMISE

by Eric Vinicoff and Marcia Martin

DROPLETS. FORMING out of gray, falling to a swift end. Raising music from the apartment roof. Streaking the windows into distortion of the city traffic below.

Shiela climbed from the imprint of her presence on the made bed, went to the window and pulled the curtains very tightly shut. Returning, she smoothed out the bedspread. Then she decided against lying down again. She closed the book and put it back on the shelf. It wasn't helping. She took a quick pull on the cigarette, then stubbed it out in the ashtray. No help there either. Where was Louise?

Gray afternoon surrounded her, forcing itself into the small room despite the curtains. Incandescent light was an insufficient substitute for the natural, warming kind. She turned on the stereo to submerge the ticking of the coffee table clock.

Where was Louise?

She paced the short course around the bed that dominated the studio apartment. She shivered, challenging the claim of the thermostat. The muted decor annoyed her, neither good nor bad, cheap nor expensive, but bleak and anonymous like the day. On her salary she could afford much better. But here there were fewer eyes to watch and mouths to whisper.

The doorbell rang.

She made herself go slowly, calmly to the door. Which would it be this time? The hope or the fear?

The knob was cold to her touch. She eased the door open.

It was Louise. Relief let her breathe again.

Louise entered quickly, and they both shut the door. The deadbold slid with reassuring finality.

She wore an old sweater and jeans, much different from the outfit she had worn all day at the office. She had gone home first to change, to don the protective coloration of this part of town. As usual.

"You're late." Shiela regretted the words and tone immediately, but they accurately reflected her mood.

"Sorry. You know how the buses are." Louise pulled off her sweater, then patted her hair back in place. "Rough day, no?"

Sheila nodded. All day long they labored at different ends of the large harried ad agency, compelled to apparent indifference but keenly aware of each other's ups and downs.

What a miracle they had found each other, she reflected not for the first time. Tentatively. Blunderingly. But it had happened.

Louise went ot the dresser top that served as a makeshift bar, and poured herself a drink. "You?" she asked.

"Not just yet, thanks." Shiela sagged back onto the bed, wishing the tension

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would seep away faster. "I'm glad you could make it today. It seems so long . . ."

Louise gulped half of her vodka, then perched on the foot of the bed by Shiela's legs. "It is a long time. You think you're the only one who lives for these days? But how else can we possibly work it?"

Shiela sighed. They had been through all the hopeless options too many times. "But we sure as hell don't have to like it."

In this one place, with this one person she could let the real her crawl out from between the armor plates. They talked; about work and other things. Long silences without strain framed their thoughts. They even laughed.

All the while Shiela watched Louise's face. The body she knew well; long, trim and strong. Stronger than her own more compact one, though they were both passing thirty. But the face was ever new, to sight and touch. In the past year it had grown to richness, more full with each revelation. Valleys of wisdom. Here a curve of gentleness. A blush of determination. Wrinkles of passion. A blemish of things said and done between them. All orchestrated into the map of a person.

Louise began running a hand up and down Shiela's leg. "Stop that," Shiela complained. "These nylons run if you even look at them."

"You know what you can do about that."

Shiela smiled. "You certainly have a one-track mind."

Her hands slid up Shiela's thighs, under the long skirt. "You disagree?"

Shiela felt her breath coming more quickly, in metronome time. Every inch of her body awoke with sensation. "What do you think?"

"I don't have to. I can tell."

They slid close. Together. Shiela could feel the second excited heart so near her own. Four hands fumbled as they strove to remove the final barriers. Lips touched and clung.

The lights remained on in defiance of shame, but the two women swam into a private darkness of senses other than sight.

NORMALLY SENATOR Ainsley enjoyed these committee hearings. They were a good place to catch up on readings, or just relax. But today was different. He had only a notepad in front of him. Senator Bryant, rooted smugly in his front row seat like a turnip in a Halston suit, had dropped his bombshell with no warning to other than his conservative allies. All eighteen committee members were present — a tribute to the storm stirred up by his bill. Down in the pit the committee counsel and the witness' attorney concentrated on the witness, with occasional suspicious glances at each other.

The witness was Doctor Eugene Renault, a biologist and genetic researcher with credentials an arm and a half long. He was typically uncomfortable in the witness chair, and his voice had a raspy squeak. "For more than thirty years we've known of a cell wall protein called the H-Y antigen. It first came to our attention as one of the several cell wall proteins that cause bodies to reject skin grafts and organ transplants. Specifically, it causes a female host to reject cells from an otherwise acceptable male donor."

Senator Ainsley knew what was coming. This whole ritual was to put a formal gloss on cloakroom rumor and media leak. Afterward the real war would begin. That was why breakfast was asserting its presence in his stomach.

"In 1978 Doctors Wachtel and Money discovered that the H-Y antigen plays

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a more basic role in human sexuality. It's present in all mammals, and they wondered why. They determined that it moves from cell to cell like a hormone, and serves as a messenger carrying the genetic 'signal' of male/femaleness."

Ainsley stifled a yawn. The details of the breakthrough didn't really matter. The scientists would keep playing with their test tubes, and society would have to cope with the results.

"But the H-Y antigen signals sometimes become confused. Female sexual feelings — gender identity and/or mating preference — are trapped in a physically male body. And vice versa. They determined that the confusion, when total, is the root cause of transsexualism."

The gas was becoming more than an annoyance. It was a too frequent companion these days, but he kept leaving his pills at home. Subconscious denial of the aging process, perhaps. The systems were breaking down. Oh, to be fifty again.

"That is where my team at UC Medical Center took up the work. It took us almost three years to work out the much more subtle relationship between H-Y antigen confusion and homosexuality. That was because environment plays a coequal role in homosexual development. When less than total, the confusion creates a predisposition toward abnormal gender identity and/or mating preference. Then environment takes over. Imagine two persons, identical except one suffers from partial H-Y antigen sexual confusion and the other doesn't. They grow up in the same pro-homosexual environment. The first becomes a homosexual or bisexual, the second doesn't."

He knew Senator Ho at the end of his row had the same prescription, and considered passing a note asking for a loan. That brought on a suppressed chuckle. Senator Barrett, the chairman, saw everything, and he had no desire to be caught like some overaged schoolboy.

"We went on to develop the treatment that is the core of the Bryant Act. We found a way to cure the H-Y antigen confusion, and thus eliminate the adverse effects that result from abnormal sexual development. All babies can be examined at birth, and treated if necessary. Older homosexuals and transsexuals can be cured as they are identified."

He felt lousy, and the thought of the long day of haggling ahead made it even worse. He needed something before he ruptured. There was a pharmacy over in the Senate Office Building.

"Using gene-splicing techniques we have developed a virus that invades cell walls and corrects the confusion. The genetic sexual feelings — which our research has shown to be much stronger compared to learned ones than previously believed — are altered to fully match the physical sex. *Just* the genetic feelings, not the learned ones. That's very important. This isn't brainwashing, with its repression of true feelings. It's curing the source of the confusion. What remains is the second person in my earlier example, the one whom environment didn't turn into a homosexual or transsexual. Without the predisposition one can't be either. Those treated will remember their abnormal sexual experiences; they just won't feel the same way about them."

A shotgun rattling of papers signified the end of the witness' prepared statement. Before Senator Barrett could open the hearing to questions, Senator Ainsley switched on his microphone. "Point of personal privilege, Mister Chairman?"

"Senator Ainsley?"

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"May we adjourn for five minutes? I have an urgent matter to attend to."

THE ROOM was dark, and the officer was lost in it except for the slight illumination of the television screens that vaguely lit his upper torso and face. He liked the darkness. It was hard to convince the nagger in his head that the screens weren't windows. They couldn't reveal him. And the pickups had been carefully hidden by experts.

He slouched in the too-comfortable swivel chair and yawned. Beyond the enfolding unseen walls and building cocoon there was evening, but it felt like early in the AM to him.

The console rose from his lap in a lazy curve to the ceiling, and arced horizontally along one long wall. Mostly its black plastic was invisible, but the controls between the screens dappled it with many hues.

Twenty-four screens. Most were dark; awaiting new suspects, probable cause and pickup planting. All but one of the rest he only spot-checked. Past dinner time the action would jump gears. Not his shift, thank God. Rossi took over the hot seat at eight. Fresh from the academy, new kid on the task force, she would get the same sucker punch education they all had. If she could take it, she was in.

The officer's stare returned to the one screen. Early evening was usually pretty dead, but he had hit a gem load. The ceiling view of the big bed was in sharp color; they were screwing with the lights on, obviating the need to go to the IR b/w system. All the better.

When it was men, it disgusted him. He could hardly believe the things they did to one another. Even after a year in the task force, he still couldn't cope, especially with the grosser S-M and bondage trips. And the dykes were usually ugly; no improvement there.

But sometimes he got lucky. Some of the dykes were good looking, and these were the best yet. Watching them was a definite turn-on. He wasn't the only one in the task force who felt that way, but no one discussed it except as an undercurrent in the constant barrage of dirty jokes.

He squirmed as the two hungry, writhing bodies fed on each other. He was anxious to get home. He hoped to hell Nancy wasn't in her usual rotten mood.

He briefly checked the slot in which the videotape cartridge reeled with contented ease, then resumed his avid viewing.

SENATOR AINSLEY went to the ball rack and began the ritual of finding one with the holes properly spaced for his grip. He had several at home, gifts, but preferred the ritual. Finding a suitable sixteen pound glossy black orb, he returned to the lane where Senator Ho was already warming up. "Ready for your weekly embarrassment?" Senator Ainsley asked.

Senator Ho's stocky frame swayed as he practiced his delivery. "I'm going to master this game, wait and see."

"Then you had better plan to stand for reelection. You've only got four years left in your term."

The Senate Office Building lanes were almost empty. The younger legislators had turned to younger sports. Senator Ainsley stepped up and took his four step approach. The ball hooked too sharply, and left a six-ten. "Jake Bryant worked me over at lunch. Ruined a pretty good brisket."

Laughter rumbled up from Senator Ho's belly. "He'll never learn. The tact of

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an elephant in heat."

Senator Ainsley retrieved his ball from the return circle and picked up the easy spare. "He had a few interesting things to say."

"I don't doubt it."

"For instance, he claims to have a lock on the committee conservatives. But you and your friends have eight no votes. That leaves —"

"Two probable abstentions. And you."

"So he says."

Senator Ho rolled a strike, and looked surprised. "You've always been a hard one to read. Why does California keep electing such non-doctrinaire types?"

"I promised my constituents I keep an open mind and look for the best answers."

"Is that what you're doing now?"

"Afraid so. I need to know a lot more than I do now to make a decision."

Senator Ho shook his head. "Read the *Post* today? Gallup says fifty-four per cent of the *vox populi* are for the Bryant Act. The sun seems to be setting to the right."

"Polls can be misleading." Senator Ainsley lined up his next shot. The clarity of the game helped him think, even when he didn't particularly want to.

"Well, you'll get all the facts you could possibly desire during the hearing. I just want to make sure we agree on the basic question."

The ball hit the head pin and left a seven-ten split. "Damn!" Senator Ainsley toweled sweat from his brow and hands, then sagged back onto the plastic bench. "Okay, define away."

"What is homosexuality?"

"That's it?"

"Of course."

"I must have nodded off and missed something."

Senator Ho stepped up and threw another insufferable strike. "For most of history homosexuality was thought to be a sin, a mortal crime. That's still a popular view. Alternately it's considered by some a secular crime against society, a sickness or a divergent lifestyle."

"Neatly summed." Senator Ainsley idly noticed the scorer's table devoid of any score sheet. The weekly games were recreation, the only competition being self-inflicted. "If it's a sickness, and the sickness prevents the victim from seeking a cure, then curing him or her against his or her will may be permissable."

"Whereas a lifestyle is a lifestyle."

Senator Ainsley took his turn, and overhooked to the Brooklyn side for a lucky strike. "The scientific evidence looks pretty conclusive for a genetic defect cause."

"Defect? Abnormality, please. Like green eyes."

"I take your point. Then what we're talking about is harm."

"Another slant on the same question. A sin harms one's soul. A crime harms others. A sickness harms the victim. A lifestyle isn't inherently harmful." Senator Ho rolled his ball and knocked down seven pins.

"About time," Senator Ainsley muttered. "I was beginning to wonder if you had cut a groove in the lane."

"Magnets, please. This is a technical age."

"You naturally feel homosexuality is a lifestyle, not inherently harmful. The

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liberal cant. As inflexible as Bryant's conservative one."

Senator Ho sat down after picking up the spare, and stared at him. "Meaning?"

"Meaning I don't know. I really don't — yet. Religious arguments leave me cold, and I hate slashing at personal freedom. But . . . it seems homosexuality hurts a lot of people."

"Ah, but is it the difference that hurts, or the reaction?"

"Maybe both. I don't know." Senator Ainsley made his approach, released, and the ball missed the head pin entirely, taking out only six pins. He bit off nasty expletives. How could he have dedicated so many hours over so many years to the game, and yet remain so mediocre?

SHIELA WAS rinsing lettuce for her dinner salad when the doorbell rang.

Louise wasn't expected. Nor the landlord — the rent wasn't due.

Nor anyone.

Except those constantly expected.

Every moment had been subliminal anticipation of this moment. Measured fear/resignation/anger/loss. It felt almost proper, a guest's long-awaited arrival.

She shuddered, then fought not to think beyond each step as she walked to the door.

And from there, with numbing rapidity, to the cell.

A small, clean cell in which to wait. A long, lonely week of it. Those were the main assaults. Sterility. Denial of her actualness. Unintentional — probably — but a fine preparation for her fate. No bail, of course. They knew she would flee.

Somewhere near but unknown, Louise was suffering too.

The barred door swung open. Her Public Defender — why waste money on a forgone conclusion — entered. The door clanged shut.

"Good morning," he said. He was young, stiff, obviously uncomfortable with her and his assignment. He stood at the foot of the cot on which she lay exhausted by boredom, ignoring the cell's one chair. "Shall we get to it?"

She nodded.

"How do you want to plead?"

"Louise and I are lovers. They have all the filthy proof they need. Why deny it? Why the hell should I deny it!"

"Then you want me to plead you guilty?" He looked relieved.

"Guilty! Guilty of what? Loving each other?"

"The Bryant Act states —"

"I know all about the Act! Who better? It made us hide and skulk about like criminals! Turning something beautiful into constant terror! That wasn't enough though — now you have to take even that away! Why?"

"Look, I'm here to help you if I can." But he wasn't, and she knew it. He was here to facilitate the process and its empty promise of justice.

SENATOR AINSLEY walked down the slicked marble steps, pulling his raincoat more tightly around him against the wet and cold. Snow fell from the leaden sky that was turning to evening. Wind swirled the flakes, and when they reached the ground they turned immediately into slush.

Walking down the row of curbed 'full-size' gas-eaters, he came to his and climbed into the front seat. He leaned over and kissed his chauffeur. "Lousy day, huh?"

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Alicia Ainsley, the Senator's wife, was a spare, errect woman one year his junior. "Get used to it, dear. I heard on the radio it's going to be a long winter."

He sighed. "We're out of our community property minds. I bet folks are sunbathing at poolside in L.A."

"No doubt." She looked at him closely before pulling out into the frantic rush hour traffic. "Maybe we ought to skip the Ambassador's brawl. How about a quiet dinner at home?"

"Tempting. The company would be infinitely more desirable." He attempted a leer. "But these so-called social affairs are part of the job, and I've missed more than my share lately."

"Okay, dear, but let's make it an early evening. Please."

"My thought exactly."

"How is Senator Bryant's holy crusade progressing?" she asked.

She probably knew as much about it as he did, being involved in several 'good works' organizations with fellow legislators' wives. For this among other reasons she had a viewpoint he valued. "More medical testimony today."

"Want another non-elected opinion?"

"Yours, always. In fact the silence until now has been puzzling."

"No more than yours, dear. It's a very sensitive subject, and neither of us wants to be wrong. I've been wondering what it is about homosexuality that upsets the rest of us."

He felt the sensation of finally scratching the itch. "Good question. Any notions?"

"Well, it's non-reproductive."

"Are you saying we need more population? Quite the opposite — homosexuality might be useful there."

She shook her head. "You miss my point. I know I'm a woman, instinctively. I fancy men, instinctively."

"I trust you're fairly selective." He stroked her arm and grinned.

Ignoring him pointedly, she continued. "So women who dress like men or love women feel wrong to me, instinctively. In many cases it can be overcome by education, but the instinctive reaction is there, I think."

"I've heard experts suggest that, and others disagree. Everyone gets remarkably fuzzy on the subject. Amazing the things science really doesn't know after all."

"I've been telling you that for years, dear. And if the reaction is instinctive, then the suffering is probably inevitable."

"I don't follow."

"The homosexual suffers because his abnormality is a wall between him and society unless he constantly hides it. He's an object of revulsion."

"I think 'revulsion' may be too strong. And, in any case, maybe it's society that needs changing."

"But if the reaction *is* instinctive, in most cases it probably *can't* be unlearned. Look, after so many years of 'liberal times', how many people still dislike homosexuals?"

"Maybe there wasn't enough effort put into social education."

"Ever try to educate away a gut-level reaction? It's like that man who used to walk around Berkeley with the horribly disfigured face. The pain was his, but I couldn't bear to look at him."

He thought it over. "Identification with the sick person. It evokes pain be-

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cause it could have been you. Hmmm. . . ."

"You don't sound convinced."

"I may never be convinced of anything in this mess. I'm stuffed with everyone's thoughts but my own. I'm just going to have to check it out firsthand."

She smiled. "Is there something about you I don't know?"

"Droll. Very droll. I'm going to visit my gay constituents. I'm going to claw my way out of this cocoon of hand-picked witnesses, lobbyists and lawmakers, and do my heterosexual damndest to find out what it is to be homosexual."

THE TRIAL was a dream, brief by legal standards but interminable for her. Would it ever end? She was afraid that it wouldn't, and that it would.

She sat. She said nothing, nor listened as the Public Defender and the others debated her life. The only hope left in her was to see Louise again before it was too late.

That hope failed like the rest.

"We find the defendant to be a homosexual." Those words cut through. "Remanded for treatment to the University Medical Center."

THEY WRAPPED her in a fabric womb in the austere hospital room. Machines linked to her by obtrusive wires lined the white walls, monitoring her body functions. The two RN's watching them kept their backs to her. Deliberately.

Stillness hugged her. The surgical couch under her was firmness; the layer upon layer of white sheet a deceptively yielding prison. Long since she had given up fighting. To 'protect her from harming herself' — to bind her open to their manipulation.

Her thoughts were a bleak mist drifting through consciousness.

The doctor leaned over her, smiling professionally. He was slipping from middle into old age. His eyes were tired, and lines scoured his face. She knew there had to be something behind the mask, but didn't care enough to look for it.

He picked up a syringe from a tray by her head. She started screaming.

THE HAND-LETTERED sign over the storefront read CASTRO STREET HELP CENTER. Senator Ainsley stared at it and the boarded-up windows while his four Secret Service watchdogs checked out the security. They were nervous, and ready to remove him against his will if they smelled trouble. After the bad incidents of the seventies it had become clear that Senatorial immunity wouldn't stop bullets.

Finally they let him go in. Two waited outside, the other two followed him.

The small run-down room was crowded with tables, chairs, desks and people. A radio blared tinny ultrarock. Some people were answering phones; others were in one-on-one conversations. Everyone noted his entrance and studiously ignored it.

A young man walked over to the Senator. He wore jeans and a sweater, and his expression was friendly. He put out his hand. "Senator Ainsley?"

The Senator shook it. "Thanks for letting me intrude on your work, Reverend Bain."

"Just Mister Bain these days. My superiors didn't take it very well when I came out of the closet."

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"You must have known the consequences. Why did you do it? For that matter, why did you hide your homosexuality in the first place?"

Mister Bain took a deep breath. "First I was confused. Then I felt I was a sinner, and fought to deny it. Finally I realized I was suffering for my difference, just as Christ suffered for his. I hid so I could help my fellow sufferers. And I came out to fight the Bryant Act."

"I see. I'm here, as I explained, to learn more about homosexuality."

"Why here? I assure you there are gays lurking in Washington, maybe even in the halls on Congress."

"These are the people I was elected to represent. And San Francisco has traditionally been a place where homosexuals enjoy a great deal of freedom — I want a hint of what homosexuality means stripped of persecution."

"So, to get an unbiased view, you came to my haven for the troubled?"

"To get a complete view, yes. As for the untroubled, I have you and your helpers here. It takes relatively adjusted people to help others."

Mister Bain smiled. "Touche'. Shall we take the tour?"

He lead the Senator through the noisy room to where a young woman was relaxing between phone calls. "Jill," he said, "Senator Ainsley. Senator, Jill."

They sat down around her desk.

"We all know why you're here. Ask your questions." She was composed but wary.

"You're a lesbian?"

"That's the straight word. I'm a gay woman."

"When did you first know?"

Her face showed it as she ran through jagged memory files. "My first latent feelings came with puberty, but I didn't know for sure until college."

"The new medical findings have helped us understand ourselves better," Mister Bain said. "What used to be known as latent homosexuality turns out to be the genetic sexual confusion unresolved."

"Is it always resolved?" the Senator asked.

"No. It can go one way or the other, or both — bisexuality. Or a person can war inwardly for a lifetime."

"Are you content with your life?" the Senator asked Jill.

"As much as you are with yours. I have a lover, we live together. A good job."

"Would you like to have children?"

A pause, then, "If the laws weren't so straight, Mary and I could adopt a child."

"Would you say most homosexuals are as well-adjusted as you?"

The wariness increased. "No. Most can't cope with the constant hassles."

"One last question, if you don't mind. Suppose you could go back in a time machine to puberty, and start over as a heterosexual. Would you?"

"No. And I won't take the treatment now. If the Bryant Act passes I'll fight it any way I can."

"Thank you for your time," the Senator said. He and Mister Bain rose.

Mister Bain led him over to a tiny lounge area of two ratty sofas. A teenager sat on one, staring at nothing. He wore tight black leather, boots, and his hair was crewcut. "Hi, Jorge," Mister Bain said softly.

Senator Ainsley could feel the agents behind him growing restless.

"Oh, hi, Rev."

"Want to talk to Senator Ainsley?"

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"Why not. Ain't got nothing on right now."

The Senator thought his question out carefully. "Do you have a job?"

"No."

"How do you live?"

"Welfare. And sometimes people give me money. Mostly I just hang out."

The Senator looked closely at his eyes, and realized he was high on something, just starting to come down.

"You know about the cure for homosexuality that has been discovered?"

Jorge spat on the floor. "Knock that off or get out," Mister Bain said sharply.

"I take it you have no desire to change?"

"Shit, man, life is the pits."

"You want to be cured?"

"No, I wanna be rich." He broke into cackling laughter, and headed for the door.

"He's into the street S-M scene," Mister Bain said softly. "He was referred here by a court after a half-assed suicide attempt, and has been a regular customer for our services ever since."

They moved around the room some more, and Senator Ainsley talked to several other people. Finally he said to Mister Bain, "I think I've heard enough."

They headed for the door, where Mister Bain stopped him. "I keep an eye on politics. I know you're the swing vote on the committee considering the Bryant Act."

"And you want to know which way I swing."

Mister Bain frowned.

"I wouldn't want my grandchildren to be born with the genetic sexual confusion," the Senator said carefully. "I wouldn't want them to be homosexuals, bisexuals, transsexuals or anything in between."

"Because of the shame?"

"Because of the pain. The internal doubts and the prejudice."

"Pain can be overcome, or endured."

"But is that desirable?"

"To save one's identity, yes!"

"I agree."

Mister Bain took a moment to regroup. "You do?"

"I've seen a great deal of courage here. You've earned the right to your choices."

"You sound like a politician all right, taking both sides at once."

"That's because, as in most tough questions, both sides have a measure of rightness."

"You're going to abstain?"

"Hardly. I'm going to earn my salary."

"How?"

"Compromise."

THE SUN should have been welcome after its long absence. But as Shiela pushed tentatively through the hospital lobby and out the self-opening doors it assaulted her. She winced. Blinked. Why? The spring afternoon should be comforting her.

No one stared. Many in the streams passing around her must know, from hospital rumor or her shaken appearance. But the treatment was no longer

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novel in a world more and more attuned to sensation.

Home. Her apartment. No longer what it had been, but a haven, a destination, a goal of sorts for a life rubbed blank.

Help had been offered, but she didn't want it. She had suffered too much of their help. She would beat the nightmares and pain herself. Somehow.

She still had a home. And a job — the Act forbade firing for a curable illness. The husk of a life remained.

Cured? When she could barely live with what had been? When would the cure end?

And what kind of existence could there be for her now? Legislation wouldn't stop the whispers, remove the brand.

She descended the wide marble steps. The curbside taxi stand was barren of cabs, so she walked to the nearest green bus bench.

Louise was seated there.

Their eyes found each other's unbidden, and locked. Unforgivingly.

Something welled up inside of her, born of precious moments preserved in the amber of memory. She took a quick step forward. Her smile was reflected in Louise's face.

Then a hammer smashed down, shattering her into a million shards that melted like ice under the sun. Sickness filled the void. Her gut twisted. Tears came. What she . . . they . . .

Louise turned away. She turned too, and walked very rapidly away.

For the rest of her life.

THE END

HARV MELLIS ripped the last page from his typewriter, compiled the whole manuscript and slammed a staple home. "Through the heart, damned vampire of the intellect!"

Across the den a pile of pillows and blankets trembled, and tousled blond hair emerged, followed by the upper half of a distinctly feminine torso. "Wuh, darling?"

"Victory, my love! Roust your luscious self and call that lowlife agent I carry! Tell him I'm taking the story down to the studio! If he wants to close that mag sale, he had better meet me there!"

She yawned and looked at the clock on the desk. "You've been at it all night. You need sleep."

"No time for sleep. I'll sleep tonight."

She pouted. "What about me?"

"Never fear. I'm a man of many talents. Now get dressed and help, my love!"

Her pout grew poutier, but she reached for her clothes on a nearby chair. "What's the hurry? You usually consider a deadline as an indecent suggestion."

"This isn't a story! This is a nuke in the war against the Bryant Act! I'm going to personally adapt the screenplay for the TV movie, so no hack can gut it! Shooting begins today! The show will be seen in three weeks, while the controversy yet waxes! All to make megabucks, of course, but it'll get the message out in time!"

He jammed his habitually unlit pipe between his teeth, put on his shoes, donned a gray trenchcoat over his shorts and headed for the door.

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THIS IS the Senate Cloakroom," the unctious speaker voice began. "Motion vote on SB117 in five minutes. Thank you."

Senator Ainsley shoved back his paperwork and rose from his desk. These three-to-eight times daily rollcall votes were a scandal of inefficiency and inconvenience which no institution less archaic than the Congress would tolerate. He didn't even care about SB117, something to do with interstate transit, but he had a *quid pro quo* with Senator Barron, so . . .

He left his office and headed down the corridor for the elevators. Other senators were doing likewise, a slow-motion parody of the scramble scene from a WWII flying film.

The elevator took a full load of overaged warriors down to the Senate Office Building basement. There they stepped into the ever-moving peoplemover cars.

"Over here!"

His eyes found the source of the shout. Senator Ho was in a car alone. He climbed in.

"Ready for the showdown with Bryant tomorrow?" Senator Ho asked.

"Just about."

"Have the votes?"

"I think so. Your help with the liberals has been invaluable. Some feel my compromise still goes too far, but it beats the alternative. I have six solid votes and one on the line."

"How about Bryant's people?"

"I've been talking around, but not as productively. Only three votes."

Senator Ho smiled. "I don't need my calculator to tell me you have a majority."

"I have nothing until the votes are cast."

"We do get cautious in our elder days, don't we?"

The car was moving along a dim corridor under the busy street. Similar cars moved past them the other way, mostly empty.

"I met with the President this morning," Senator Ainsley said.

"And?"

"He'll sign the Bryant Act after we amend it. He had been unhappily resigned to signing the original version. Now —"

"Now he can more easily live with it. Without the mandatory treatment provisions for homosexuals and transsexuals, you just have examinations for all babies at birth and mandatory treatment where genetic sexual confusion is found. Nowhere nearly as controversial."

"Though the word genocide is still cropping up in my mail." Senator Ainsley took a deep breath. "Maybe the knowledge that this will be their last generation will ease the prejudice."

"That TV movie certainly took a big first step. Did you have that in your hip pocket?"

"People keep asking. No one believes me when I tell them it was purely benevolent coincidence."

"Coincidence is a wonderful thing. My staff, being fond of statistics, tells me the movie drew the largest television audience in history. That doesn't impress me much — I don't watch television. But the tidal wave of anti-Bryant Act public reaction does."

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"You should see the movie," Senator Ainsley said. "It's powerful. It has as much to do with the success of my compromise as all my jawboning."

"We work in mysterious ways, my friend."

The car reached the station Capitol basement. They climbed out and headed for the elevators. ■

Marcia Martin
Eric Vinicoff

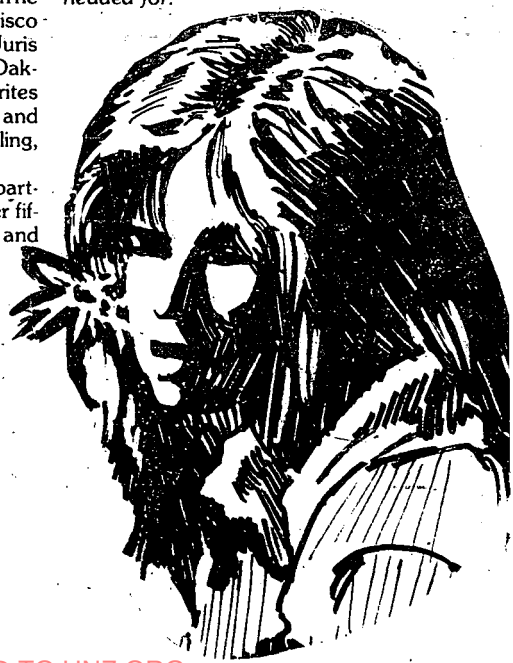
Marcia Martin was born in San Francisco. She started writing science fiction with Eric Vinicoff at the University of California at Santa Cruz, where she obtained a bachelors degree in Medieval History. She now lives in San Jose with her electronics engineer husband, Demian, and a four-year-old son. When not pursuing literary matters, she spends her time caring for a vegetable garden and orchard, chickens, bees, a horse and a collection of tropical birds.

Eric Vinicoff was born in Memphis, Tennessee in 1951. He grew up in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; Berkeley, California; and Santa Monica, California. He attended the University of California at Santa Cruz, and received a BA in Political Science. Then he attended the University of San Francisco School of Law, and received a Juris Doctor degree. He currently lives in Oakland, California, is an attorney, and writes science fiction part-time. He is single, and among his other interests are gambling, eating and travel.

Together they have been writing part-time for five years, and have sold over fifteen stories to various magazines and anthologies.

WHY WE CHOSE THIS STORY

The writers have presented some sensitive views on a very difficult subject. The idea of government attempting to control this "abnormality" is not at all preposterous, although it should be. Prevention of homosexuality at the genetic level just may someday be possible, but whether or not such a procedure would ever be an acceptable application of science could remain, along with abortion, an unsolvable controversy. Senator Ainsley was very humane and objective in his search for the "right thing to do". But where were the outraged cries and marching feet of gays and others opposed to such treacherous interference in private lives? Apparently this could well be one future we may be headed for.



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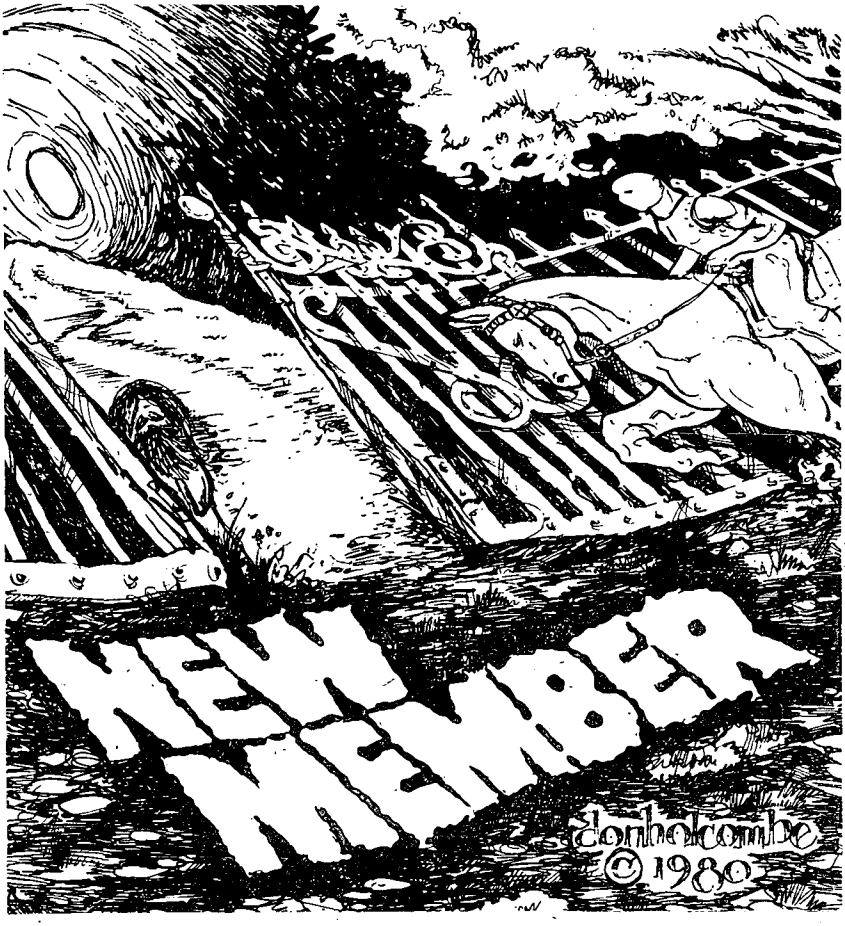

Illustrated by Don Holcombe

Is this all there is???

by David R. Bunch

WE OLDTIMERS at The Sloom were having another one of our Excite-ons. I do not mean that we heaved off the white-satin cushions or started appreciably to breathe, but so far as it was allowable, consistent with our wheres and our whats at The Sloom, we turned-on. We were going to get a new member! And that invariably made for a grisly, interesting incident, as well as for a bit of total-surprise on the new member's face . . .

Old Blue and I had just finished playing a peg-ring game, all done mentally, without touching a thing — with pegs set in a plot of time in our thoughts, and rings, resembling small halos or common little hoops, imagined out of cold, pressed dirt. I had just congratulated Blue about winning, in a mental way, and he was asking me, the same way (that's the way we flag it down at the Sloom!), "Do you think he'll do?"

"He comes all high-recommend," I replied. "As they all, of necessity, do. All

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the votes that could ever decide the case in each case have decided it. Irrevocably in favor of." My reply was only think-chat, as such things had to be. Actual voice-blab would call for energy, energy could raise turmoil, and it just would not do to go leaping in the very precise-and-proper precincts of The Sloom.

"I hear he's due on the Long Train into that Dark Last Union Station just at sundown," Blue thought at me.

"No, no train," I flashed back. "This one 'believes' he's riding a dressage horse, all hairless, that has legs like carved stalks of air, colorless and compressed, and hooves like eiderdown balls that can stamp to airborne and prance on the atmosphere. He comes on like a winner, with thoughts of honey land, streets of gold, and wings on robes of snow among pink clouds. With-harps! — Oh, he may not like it at all at The Sloom" I thought as an afterthought. "After all, he's heard — PROMISES."

"Of course there'll be the long initiation, the getting him settled in." As Blue premised-back, he thought-sighed. And I thought-sighed. We were both a little sad and overwrought, as we always at such times were apt to be. We let the holes for our eyes look deep into each the other's need for isolation, and we thoughtfully understood. The peg-ring game and talk about the new member, and the realization of his coming Realization — these had wrung us out. We would rest awhile and then talk again. With our thoughts.

While I rested, I wondered about the others (as I always do). Their bods-gone were scattered about me, all in serene attitudes, and their mentals were, it seemed to me, after the short time of the Excite-on about the new member, now returned to long-rest. I wondered about them in all leisure and took time. To wonder intensely would tire me more than working thought. And I wanted to be ready to resume with Blue when Blue was ready for talk-back. Because Blue was nearest to me in time-think, I carried on with him more than with all the others put together. On the date of my arrival at The Sloom we had gone on at it all that night. We were both young then, and very scared in The Membership; and I was younger in The Membership than Blue by one week.

WHILE I yet waited now for Blue to come wake-back, I mind-grabbed me a piece of the Living Light and got ready to roll on what I do the best. I tell myself the Glimpses: Picture Post Card Trips, Time Scampers and Space Samplers, Long Excursions of the Mind that Walks All Day and All Night — through many a tedious melancholy hour in The Membership. While They, seemingly, just sleep or do nothing, absolutely weird nil nothing. I doubt They ever go tripping on their own. (But They may do it. How do I KNOW They do not?) But once I have pulled down the Light-Think to start the thought-trip and have gone clack-clicking (bone-talking), I have to go on, I and the shapes I have chosen. Or may be the shapes have chosen me!

This time two non-resembling horses, about as disparate as a white mouse and a gray rat might be, were moving toward the Valley of the Small Gate, along the old White Disc Road. Lathered and long-tripped, one horse ten lengths ahead of the other, they came on down. One was an angular horse, a steed the likes of which a god of old bones might choose to ride out on. The head of this sorry nag peck-peck-pecked at the way, like a pale red hammer slapping in carpet tacks, and the hind quarters sided down with this amazing effect of sloping on three sides, like a board hobby, as the horse ran. When the tail switched there was a grindy noise, raspy and grisly-grainy, that could scare one, and the

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sorrel coat was all rough and stood up like about ten trillion little red pieces of wire, night and day. Around the eyes, constantly blinking and rolling, were small sores that threatened all ways to rot them, and the only beauty about the beaten nag, the crystal-like clear-as-glass little hooves I knew must shatter clear down to leg stubs when the weather came on dry, or if chance took them across stone. The belly was all but gone and the guts seemed quite shrunken away, or really tucked up tight; almost as small, I guessed, as spaghetti tubes now. Indeed he was not a round horse, but he ran with that kind of relentlessness that seemingly would never have to retire from the race. For such a horse there should be a small leather-dry rider with will of cold resolve, a bitter no-hope strap slapper all gone in the mirth parts, a horse booter who, from a kind of set compulsion, would spur the going on, even through convinced that all were Emptiness roads and all were No-Getting-There roads and on-going was the only place whatever ever to go — forward, ho! — shake reins, rain whip — heads down for Empty Town! Perhaps with such a rider on my sorry Rosinante the Myth of the White Disc could be penetrated — a thing to be hoped for, certainly — and passage might be gained through the Valley of the Small Gate, down-the-line. I decided to be that rider, mount my imagination's sorry jade and try to go there. And if Blue awoke and thought at me and my thoughts were riding out — oh sure, he would think me again.

I drew The Companion up — my Companion now! and he came in hell's own thunder on a big horse, dressage-parading faultlessly from ten lengths back. The huge steed had no hair! no, absolutely none. And this show horse, being clean-shaved, had no color in the way of a horse now — none whatsoever; he was almost unbelievably smooth and pale. And years ago, in the interest of his coming-across more blocky for the fairs perhaps, his tail had been quite cropped away (when he was a very young colt) to leave just a pitiful stub on which to hang maybe some ribbons, or just wrap it up. (Today the streamers on there were deep black and heavy-on.) The rider, a tall thick man in the leather, was, like his horse, pale, and also hairless — at least hairless on the head — and his beardless face was quite wan-white and carried a constant small expression, carried it so consistently that it had really very nearly no meaning of any kind at all. "Why did you shave your joggy-bob?" the brazen I asked forthwith the dim thing that now I had before me.

"TO MAKE HIM PURE AS CRYSTAL! AND CLEAR AS CRYSTAL ICE!" was the at-once thought-reply, booming and self-sure. "No one riding live and colored hacks can ever hope to find the Valley of the White Rays. And that's where I AM going! Or my name's not Justus Goodman Ontathere."

"Oh ye-ess," I answered. "And do you think I should clean-shave my pony too?"

"No. OH NO!" The reply was very firm and clear. "You're just riding along. You'll know when you get as far as you can get. They're sure to stop you then. And cut you back at the Judgment. I'll leave you at a tall black gate with a heavy lock locking you out and shoot on into that Pure-Light-That-Blinds!" He pushed up a thick breast under some ancient white metal plate then; he flexed his big dim arms and shook out the metal clangs of armor to let all parts of me guess better how to keep-the-peace. And suddenly from somewhere a glittering cross hung upon him from the neck, and at that point I have to concede he looked as sure and impregnable as any one I have ever seen — anywhere, any time. In favor of all that was decent I tried very hard not to smile. I looked straight ahead

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and kept good silence.

Two riders rode on after that through country as monotonous as a million acres of wheat stems, or an ocean without ships, bergs, or boats. The March winds tore at my several levels of thought and cast them far wide down the road ditches, rattled them in ice-bottomed horse tracks, blew them along the drear monotony of a road with no hedge-tree fences, with only the long-wire restraints.

The Companion was silent a very great time, letting his face quietly nurse the small expression. Then he burst forth a laugh that pealed over the wind's steady roaring. And it was a little incongruous, that raucous sound of mirth from the man of small expression, while he to all appearances sat on that great clean-shaved, prancing and pale steed easy as a baby in a buggy headed for church. He stared at me, and he herded enough little blandnesses to a given part of his face to look triumphant. "Do you know," he asked me, "why you WILL have to stay back, while I shoot on into that Pure-Light-That-Blinds?"

"I didn't clean-shave my horsie," I guessed forthwith in a jocular vein, "times enough to win it? It's all tonsorial, I would hazard. Appearances!"

"No! oh No!" He howled and frolicked like a man with something funny loose in the empty back rooms of his brain. "It's the way you ride." Instinctively, and as fast as I could, I tried to improve my seat on my little joggy trotter. "No! I mean, it's not your seat, it's your roadway, it's your purpose-lack to and from. You ride in a tube. To Nowhere. Down your little slot you sally in a round dark trough with a cover of black roof on top of it. You don't believe, except in going and the end of your tube. And there's nothing for you at the end of your dark race course but a piece of cold air. A big piece of cold air, if you want it. A little piece of it, if you so choose. But you don't cherish any of these. You just fare on into the next pipe-track, and up ahead at the end of it there's another absolutely hollow, meaningless, airy zero — and your eternal dilemma. Even a house mouse comes to the end of the hole for something. Either a nest mate or a piece of old cheese, depending upon how and who baited. But you —" Then his laugh beat down the March wind again with the bellowing of his sneer.

"I ride," he continued, "believing in all things that promise for the good of my Reward. My soul is my most-precious, and my horse is fat and really fine. He jogs as easy as my mother's cradle once rode me snug and warm, *swing-a-swung, swing-a-swung.* And the White Disc is but a giant halo stone where they slice off head bracelets for all us saintly folk — who deserve head bracelets. My blood-flesh-bones old bod must be off-and-away now, like the husks of some seeds go in wind-flail falling fall, to shed me shiny. Much as all the lands and other valuable properties I won for being strongest and fastest are now stripped from my hand that's at this very moment in the casket, cold and very still. But I'll just go on up into that White Light Country at my time, with no fear, and a piece of glory will be allotted mine. You will look out from one of your miserable little pipe tracks one of these future days, maybe a million miles on down this faithless circle your thoughts sally, and you will see a sharp new light. That will be my head! all halo-braceleted and on high. And God —" (He went on a long time like this, with much speech about his passing and how God would surely be waiting to welcome him into Paradise. Because he had followed the rules, because he has been good! — One could only listen and smile and try not to be unkind. And I admit I had once been impressed myself by the poetry of the beautiful thoughts. And yes! I was a lot sorry to KNOW that he wasn't even just

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a little bit on right, for his was a beguiling concept. And oh, if it could have been that he could have been . . .)

So we rode. When we came to the edge of the White Disc Country, the big steed cantered faster, all pale as any ghost, but faring strong. My little sorrel, jogging relentlessly, was hard pressed to keep abreast. But he would not be left back, and the way he clattered and scampered now trying to match the pace, I feared his clear-shell little hooves might suddenly just shatter to slivers and chips, leaving us stranded and lost, dead-stopped on leg stumps! But it didn't happen, and side by side finally the big man and I passed through the small gate into the White Disc Valley.

Far toward the end of this Valley, mile/on mile on down, we saw what appeared to be a tiny black spot on a tall gray hill of stone. We rode in that direction. We stopped when an old man who looked something like a tall post of living, walking hair flagged us down. "You are now in what is called the White Disc Valley," he said, starting right off mechanically on what sounded like the beginning of a set speech — as if it were routine, he had been expecting us all the time and knew just when we would be coming along. "It is called that because of the dark spot on that tall gray hill of stone over there. That hill is all the Ages old, and I am Time. It, the hill, is many kilometers away, and yet, sometimes, when the mists are swirling and rolling a certain way through the Valley, that hill can seem almost to nudge my feet. The spot is the opening of a small tunnel through the hill of that cold gray stone. Your passage through that hole is exactly coequal with that other magical event of your life — your birth. When a human being passes through that tunnel to come out on the other side, he or she knows for the very first time in life exactly what to expect. It surprises some and disturbs almost everyone. But the whole trick is to be brave. With a mind-set terrible resignation. Just go on through, as you must, don't look back, keep it together, and above all, don't expect miracles. The last Man through here who talked big on More-Than-You-See is supposed to have to stage another try back through. But I'm about ready to close the gates and rust them shut. I don't think He'll make it." Then he gestured for us to go, as if he was glad to be finished with things he was required to say, but things he had very little interest in, or maybe no interest in whatsoever. Folding his arms and wrapping them in hair, he seemed entirely finished with us now and ready to stand moveless forever.

The Vital Companion jumped and quivered on the huge mound of shaved horse. The small expression broke into several tinier ones that jostled and seethed. "What about the White Disc?" he cried in a voice all full of worry and woeful need. "Where is it? And My Halo? AND MY GOD?!"

The Old Man of the Valley slowly unwrapped his arms out of his body hair and his beard, and again he started up the engines of speech. "You will see the White Disc if you hurry," he intoned. "It is a white piece of air in the daytime, just before you finish through the tunnel shadows. At night you have to wait until morning, if you want the same effect." Then he looked at the great shaved horse and smiled, a very sad, but tolerant, little smile. "If you think you require a halo, just circle a piece of the air about leaving time. Imagine it shiny, and wear it how ever you choose — to suit your needs. — And your God? My God? Our God? God?" — His eyes seemed depthless holes for a tiny sliver of time then, a small opening of light through which one might jump to search and search and keep on looking. But he folded his arms into his "body suit" of long, white hair

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again — closed up — and the three of us somehow knew there was nothing more he could say on the matter of God, or that anyone could, and still have clarity. And so it was finished and done.

BLUE WAS urgently thinking at me again now, so I was glad I had completed my clack-clicking (bone talking) journey and was "home". I dismounted the acute thought from the lean little horse of the red straight-pin hair and the clear-as-a-glass-shell hooves and let the dim Companion, the pale-horse rider, storm on through alone. "According to impressions just now arriving in by simple vibrations," Blue thought at me excitedly, "our new member is just now at the outer, iron gates of The Sloom. He's a huge one; he has no hair; and he shakes as though he had come to us by joggy-bob down a long and lively track — or *thinks* he did."

"Yes, Blue," I thought-replied, "he is a huge, bald man — almost no hair at all on all that meat and mistakes! And yes, he 'thought' he was riding a special, select, sacred horse. But in almost no time at all in our wet and wormy 'clubhouse' he'll seem just like any member!"

"For sure," Blue thought-answered me, "he'll BE just like any member!"

"Could we have maybe a short go at the peg-ring thing while they're settling him in?" I thought-spoke Blue, for I needed oh-so-much some think-sport to keep my mind now from "thinking".

Blue was all for it. So we "made" the pressed-soil rings and placed a little peg at a distance then; and we played all night that night, the cold-dirt game near the "clubhouse" grounds, making the very best that we could of it in our body-snuggie sod suits in a cold and lonely place in our Membership at The Sloom. ■

David R. Bunch

"David R. Bunch is David R. Bunch." (Except, of course, when he is Darryl Groupe.) For those readers who might need more information, Bunch has been published many times in both *Fantastic* and *Amazing*. He lives in Missouri, works as a cartographer for the US Air Force, studies (and laments) the human condition, studies and appreciates the arts — and writes. His writings include novels (an SF novel, Moderan, 1971), hosts of short stories for anthologies and magazines, and poetry for newspapers, magazines and a book-length collection.

That aside, the following quote originally appearing in the June, 1965 *Amazing* demonstrates clearly that David R. Bunch is really vastly more than just David R. Bunch: "I'm not in this business primarily to describe or explain or entertain. I'm here to make the reader think, even if I have to bash his teeth out, break his legs, grind him up, beat him down, totally chastise him for the terrible and tinsel and almost wholly bad world we allow . . .

"The first-level reader, who wants to see events jerk their tawdry ways through some used and USED old plot — I love him with a hate bigger than all the world's pity, but he's not for me. The reader I want is the one who wants the anguish, who will go up there and get on that big black cross. And that reader will have, with me, the saving grace of knowing that some awful payment is due . . . as all space must look askance at us, all galaxies send star frowns down, a cosmic leer envelop this small ball that has such great Great GREAT pretenders."

WHY WE CHOSE THIS STORY

If you figure out what's happening the first time around, you haven't read the story. And if you're a Bunch fan, you know he's got a message for you. All that is required is that you dig a little and play a mindgame or two. Those who don't bother needn't worry; they'll find out all about it when they are conscripted into the club. First appearing with "The Flesh Man from Far Wide" (November, 1959 Amazing), the author has had some 60 stories in Amazing and Fantastic over a ten-year period. We're glad to have him back!

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I WAS IMPLANTED at the base of his brain. Jack purchased me at a discount and got the operation free. Shortly after I was inside I learned the whole story. Jack's parents were the first to suggest he try it when they saw him over Christmas. His wife seconded the motion with a passion he hadn't noticed in her for years. So he came to see Dr. Brock, the man who made me.

"Your problem is commonplace," Brock had said. "Otherwise I wouldn't be in business." He chuckled at his observation but Jack just sat there and waited. Jack was never known for his humor. "What you need is a dependable C-31. That's the standard model. Nothing fancy."

"What is a fancy one?" asked Jack.

"Oh, just trimmings. People who like to think of themselves as erudite, or above the herd if you like, will order a culture model — it recites Shakespeare to them. The advice they receive is the same as if they were using a C-31. They feel it is less mundane, and within our little world it is sort of a status symbol I suppose."

"Do you think I'm mundane?"

Brock laughed. "No, Jack. Please don't misunderstand me. But the forms you filled out, the tests you took, the interviews . . . all indicate you'd simply be happier with the standard model. Frankly, you don't seem to have any preferences. Is there something you haven't told us? A hobby perhaps?"

Jack took a few seconds to answer: "No."

"Well then, it's settled."

The Competitor

by Brad Linaweaver

A Little Voice told me so

Dr. Brock put me in Jack's head the very same afternoon. It didn't take more than thirty minutes. The operation is so smooth you can't even detect a scar when it's over. So there I was, snugly in Jack's cranium. His new friend. It didn't take long to find out why Jack needed me. My programming prepared me to assimilate information directly from Jack's mind. He thinks, therefore I am. I lived through the conversation preceding the operation (old Brock strikes me as a bit pompous). And then Jack and I talked about his problems. (That doesn't sound quite right, of course. I should say we had a dialogue at the nonverbal level. Just our two voices-in-the-mind whispering back and forth.)

"I'm your new conscience," I said.

"You're a C-31," he answered. "You're not real. I'd have to be born with a conscience, and since I never had one, you're what I end up with."

"You shouldn't feel that way," I said. "Lots of people admit they have consciences but then do the most horrible things. Any good psycho-historian can give you a dozen examples of dictators who fit the pattern. The fact is that everyone has a conscience of some kind. It is what they choose to do about it that makes the difference. I'm an *aid* to you, Jack. I'll become part of the conscience you already have." I thought I handled that rather well; diplomacy without being patronizing.

"A disc in my head, that's what you are," he said morosely. It took me a

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moment to realize he had said that sentence out-loud!

"Jack, you've just made a blunder. You shouldn't . . ."

"I know," he said, non-verbal again. "That would sound to any passerby like I was talking to myself."

"Not out loud, Jack! That's all you have to remember. Because you really are 'talking' to yourself. I am you. Get that through *your* head — if you'll excuse the choice of words — and we'll get along fine. Don't think of me as a 'me'."

"If only I could get over this idea that I'm inferior. I need you the way I need a crutch. Lots of other people are walking around without these things in their heads."

"You'd be surprised how many famous, successful people avail themselves of this service."

"Exceptions! You and I both know . . ."

"You're getting schizophrenic."

"*We* both know . . ."

"Same difference."

"Oh hell, *I* know that most people think that the Conscience Industry mainly deals with criminals. Dr. Brock made his breakthrough as a prison doctor! Then he branched out into the marketplace."

"So what?"

"I'm not a criminal."

"It's all the more to your credit that you volunteered."

"You've been in my head long enough," he said, "to know this wasn't my choice. I haven't made a real choice in years." I knew. A part of his past that never left him was the knowledge that he hadn't married the woman he had wanted — instead, he let himself be influenced by his parents in their self adopted role as match-maker.

That night I met his wife. The image he carried of her in his mind made her appear older and, well, courser than she actually was. "You don't look any different," she said without preamble.

"It's in my head."

"Well?" she asked.

"Well?" he asked back.

"Hey," I whispered. "Smile at her. Show her some teeth." He smiled but it was forced. "No, not like that," I went on. "Put some warmth into it." He tried again. It worked this time.

"Come over here," she said. He did, and they made love right there in the living room. For a while we didn't have any dialogue. Jack was content. But later that night I had to earn my keep. There was trouble.

I already knew that they disagreed about Jack's job. The argument had been going on for months now. "How can you disagree with me?" she asked, in a shocked tone of voice. "They promised me you'd be all right after today."

Here's where I came in. Jack was hurt by her comment, but the pain was dulled. After years of denying his feelings, you'd almost expect those feelings to be dead. It isn't so. They lie dormant.

Some might criticize what I did next. But it was my job. Dr. Brock had no intention of disrupting society. Dangerous potential was in his work, but he held a tight reign over the implementation of his theories. All kinds of moralists attacked him but he maintained he was giving society what it wanted.

I told Jack to give in. He did. The argument ended that night. The next day Jack went to work. He was manager at a plant. By noon he had fired a man, one

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of those new college grads who think they know everything. The problem wasn't with the young man's ideas — he had suggested a plan that would save the company some money in the first month. But his personality grated on his fellow workers, the ones who had been at the job for years. It had gotten to a point where if Jack didn't fire the new man, he might get himself in trouble when a company re-shuffling came.

Something had made Jack reticent to do his duty. A feeling. It was driving his wife crazy with worry that he would place anything ahead of the security of his family; of her, in other words, as there were no children. Obviously he needed a good conscience to help him do what was right.

We discussed it later. "Why did you make me do it?" he asked.

"There you go again, playing Jekyll and Hyde with yourself. I am you, not somebody else."

"A conscience should get you to do what is right," he said.

"Right for whom?"

"But the guy was doing his job."

"Was he? Wasn't part of his job to fit in? His personality was getting in the way of his ability to do what was expected of him. You have six months of memories of him — and I see from the self-righteous attitude he displayed today that your memories are accurate. You did the right thing."

"It didn't seem right."

"What about your responsibilities?"

"Well, with you around, I mean with my new understanding of things, it was easier to do. If not right."

"You'll get over it. Give it time." I paused, then hit him with: "Why do you resent your wife?"

"If you want to find out everything," he said unhappily, "then root around in my mind yourself, you crummy little disc."

I kept after him: "Do you know who else you resent?"

"Besides you? Or *me*, or whatever the hell I'm talking to? You tell me."

"Parents, teachers, bosses . . ."

"So I'm a pretty normal guy!" Jack decided he was tired of sitting around the house and went for a walk. A few minutes later he opened up again. "You remember what I said about choice?" — As if I could forget! — "Sometimes I think my whole life has been planned for me in advance. First it was my parents, then my wife, and now you."

"This attitude is at the core of your problem."

"Why do you refer to me in the third person, if you're me? Ha, I caught you there."

"Dialogue forces us into little awkwardnesses. You just keep remembering that what I tell you are *your* decisions. Now, before we go any further, answer one question. Do you feel better than you used to?"

"Yeah." There was no hesitation, I was pleased to note. "I was having headaches before. Really bad ones. That was one of the reasons she suggested I see Dr. Brock."

"Then your wife does care."

"Wait a minute!" His mind literally shouted. For a moment I thought he'd speak out loud but I was pleased to see he held himself in check."

"What?"

"*The voices are gone!*"

That was a wonderful moment for me. From the beginning, I had understood

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that a major objective of my tenure in Jack's skull was to free him from the counterfeit consciences that had been hounding him for years. In the absence of a firm conviction on his part to be responsible for his actions, the voices had grown. He was suffering in a self-created limbo between the urgings of his deepest convictions and the demands of the people he lived and worked with. The voices yammering in his brain were more than a little familair: they were Mom and Pop, a bully in the old neighborhood, his first girl friend, aunts and uncles, a sundry boss or two . . . and of course his wife. Now they were silenced. I did the job they had done.

His wife was happier than she'd been in years. She sensed his new found commitment to the things she believed in. The urgings from deeper wells in Jack's mind simply dissipated. Such is the nature of getting a C-31.

For the first few months it was necessary for Jack to check in with Dr. Brock. This was really nothing more than a formality. Because of a zealous young Senator attempting to impose regulations on the industry, Brock had become sensitive to public relations. The catch-phrase around the office was, "We Don't Forget Your Trust In Us."

"Your employers have been in touch with me," Brock said, beaming. "They are pleased with the way you handled a problem on the job shortly after the implant. Congratulations."

"Thank you," said Jack without prompting.

"From the way they were praising you, I wouldn't be surprised to learn there's a promotion ahead for you." Then Brock ran the tests. Routine procedure; routine result.

All was well with my world. Jack was a success.

Looking back, I still don't forgive myself for losing control of the situation only a week after the visit to Brock. It is not smart for a disc to attempt to dictate, except a little bit at a time. You don't want to turn the host's mind against you. But I was too soft, I guess.

If only Jack hadn't run into Phil at that damned bar. Jack was already drinking too much that night. He hardly needed Phil's bad example. I had noticed a gradual increase in Jack's alcohol consumption. Drink was the one flaw in my work. My victories that had seemed so secure were starting to show hairline cracks.

Phil sat there, a grin on his round face, as he ordered Jack another Scotch on the rocks. My attempts to warn Jack were met with stubborn resistance. I knew that Phil was the subversive element in Jack's past. Sooner or later I'd have to be able to deal not only with him but with any future Phils. I did not doubt that I could pass the test.

Phil's high, sarcastic voice got right to the point: "I hear you have it in your head now."

"It's true."

"A shame," said Phil. "I didn't think you'd really do it." They drank in silence for a moment. I kept quiet. It was best to find out what Phil was up to before counseling Jack.

"I don't mean to disturb you," said Phil at last, "but you know what I think of Dr. Brock." Jack inclined his head and continued absently swirling ice in his glass. "This so-called Conscience Industry is curious to say the least. Have you ever heard of a disc being removed? Is there a record of a single dissatisfied customer?"

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Now was the time! I told Jack to get out of there; had he been sober, I'm sure he would have left. Damn the alcohol in his system. Try as I might, his will remained just out of reach. He turned a pained expression in Phil's direction.

"What's the matter?" Phil wanted to know. "Won't that thing let you answer?"

"Look, you've got it wrong. I'm still me. I decide what to do."

"Yeah?" said Phil. "I'll bet that thing is telling you to call this conversation short." I was taken by surprise. For a moment I stopped my entreaties.

Phil wasn't giving up. "Would you put it to a test?" he asked.

"What do you mean?"

"A bet. Like the good old days. I'll even give you the better odds."

This was probably where I made an error in judgement. It had reached a point where I thought my best course of action was not to advise Jack what to do. Not then, anyway. Phil had made him self-conscious. I hoped that his good sense — for despite anything else amiss with my host, he had an admirable survival mechanism predating me — would see him through.

"What's the bet?"

Phil kept grinning. I didn't like the look of that at all. It was too big a smile, making his orange face appear a jack-o'-lantern. "Jack, you know my work has paralleled Brock's. I'm qualified to criticize him."

"I know that your attempt failed to get Brock's business outlawed. The court did not find that the Conscience Industry is an invasion of privacy. That new Senator isn't doing any better."

"The operation was your wife's idea," said Phil, his smile gone. "She has probably fed you every detail that was printed in the gossip rags about how I went off half-cocked against poor Dr. Brock."

"She's never approved of you."

"Nor I her. So we're even. The bet doesn't involve her. It's between you and me." Phil finished his drink. "This isn't the place to give you my proposition. If you're still *free*, then come over to my place for a visit."

One of Jack's old voices came back into his head at that point, without any prompting from me. Clear as a bell, I heard his wife telling him he'd better not go. To side with that voice was, I felt, at this point not a prudent thing to do. Despite the garbage this Phil character was feeding him about being enslaved to his disc, Jack knew he could do what he wanted.

They left. Phil's house was in walking distance and they were strolling up his driveway in a few minutes. A black cat eyed them suspiciously from a window. Once they were inside, though, the cat did not appear again. This had me thinking that the creature was a familiar of this smooth talking wizard (I'm not a bard, but like all C-31's I have a cultural/history background to draw upon).

"Be careful," I warned Jack.

"You've decided to talk again," he answered. "Relax, Phil is an old friend."

"They can be the most dangerous kind," I said.

They sat down in two comfortable old chairs, a stonework coffee table between them with a bottle of brandy and small glasses already set out. I could feel Jack's thirst, the anticipation of the burning liquid going down, so I didn't bother raising any objections. He reached out, took the glass offered him and sipped. It wasn't the liquor that tipped me off that something was wrong; it was the intent expression on Phil's face, as he said, "Remember the games we used to play when we were kids?"

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Jack did. So I did. An awkward part of my job is that all sorts of knowledge is available to me *only* when Jack dregs it up from the misty regions of the deep mind. I suppose Brock thinks that a C-31 shouldn't be omniscient. Or maybe there is a technical problem involved. I don't know my limit on data. Self knowledge can be a dangerous thing, even for a Conscience. Anyway, I do what I'm supposed to.

The image that flashed through Jack's mind was of Phil, the practical joker. Phil said: "The bet is that you will approve, eventually, of a stunt I've prepared for you."

"Get to the point," Jack answered but the words were slurred. He was starting to feel dizzy.

"Maybe you don't know it," Phil continued, "but that C-31 in your head can't be taken out or nullified without killing you! They say it's a problem in their technique and cover for themselves with verbal obfuscation in the contract, but it all boils down to a simple lie. They don't want you to have an option. Don't forget these things were developed for ex-convicts; the good folk didn't feel secure about criminals walking the streets. Nobody really believes in rehabilitation!

"There's a rumor, Jack, that the government has a plan to give tax breaks to 'discees.' Who knows, there may come a day when the law requires everyone to have a disc. Brock would love that."

"Phil," said Jack, his fingers suddenly numb as his glass fell to the floor and shattered into small, fine shards, "you've drugged this drink."

I shouted advice! I envisioned Jack's body running, running, getting away. But the body was going under.

"I can't remove the C-31," said Phil, "but I can put something in. My device won't be booby-trapped — it can be taken out again. Only I predict you won't want to."

"Phil, Phil . . ." Jack tried to stand up. Phil walked over and put a hand on his shoulder.

"Stop fighting," he said. "There is nothing else you can do."

I was screaming at this point: "Call the police, get help!" It was hopeless.

"Why . . ." Jack began but he fell forward, unconscious. Phil pushed Jack back into the chair and I heard his footsteps walking away. I was still conscious, of course. I always was. Often when Jack slept, and dreamed, I reviewed the day's events, planning for the next waking period. That is why it was such a shock for me when Phil came back in, walked over to Jack and whispered in his right ear: "Hi, Conscience. I know you can hear me. I have something in my hand that will put you to sleep. It won't last longer than the operation, however, or I could kill you and let my aid to Jack end there. Prepare yourself for a mild electric charge." A small circle of cold metal was pressed against Jack's head and . . .

And when I came to, Jack was still unconscious at the bottom of a black, dreamless pit. I could feel that his body was back in his car that had been parked outside the bar. Phil was sure to be gone. I also noticed that I was no longer alone in Jack's head. I had company.

"Good morning," it said.

"What? Who the hell are you?"

"I'm a disc in Jack's head, same as you. Only I have a different purpose."

"What is that?"

"You'll see! Incidentally, he won't be able to hear you for a while. He'll be too busy listening to me. By the time my energy level has dropped to where you

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may be heard again, it will hopefully be too late."

"Too late for what?" But it had nothing else to say. Not to me, at any rate.

Jack woke up. The new disc went right to work. Jack noticed the difference in voices and wondered what was speaking to him. "I'm your anti-conscience," it said. He still didn't understand, but I was beginning to. "Jack, I'm your personal devil." Jack still felt groggy but he drove home. The devil sang him a song about piracy on the high seas as he drove through an upper-middle class residential section.

In one week, the devil had managed to undo all of my work. Jack began by telling his wife to shut up. The new disc egged him on. When she persisted in complaining he slapped her round face. It wasn't that hard a blow but she fell to the floor with a shocked expression that made Jack smile. By the time she recovered enough to call the police; her mother, Dr. Brock and the lawyer, Jack was gone.

He went directly to Dr. Brock's office and punched him. Since nothing like that had ever happened to Brock before, he didn't have security measures to prevent it. As Jack was on the way out the door, Brock started yelling into the intercom about how the C-31 had malfunctioned. So that's what the good professor thought of my work without even bothering to gather data! I was so mad I didn't care what Jack did next.

He went through the exit door at a run. As he was going down the steps, I noticed that he was having difficulty catching his breath. Not used to this kind of exertion, I guess. Well, I supposed it was better he should be tired out than attack someone in the elevator.

No sooner were we outside than he entered a post office and bought a postcard. For the first time, it occurred to me that this devil thing in Jack's head had a sense of humor. The note he was scribbling congratulated the anti-Brock Senator for his good work.

I caught myself laughing. It was a new sensation. I didn't even know I could do *that*. There wasn't much time to appreciate it, though, as the devil had Jack leaving a trail of outraged faces behind him that anyone could follow. Jack found the district manager of his company and punched him out for having forced Jack into firing the young man; he wrote his letter of resignation on the unconscious administrator's shirt.

Then he found the man (who had been reduced to working as a waiter) and gave him a couple of hundred out of his own pocket. That man's expression was more memorable than all the others. Talk about astonishment! During this interlude, Jack almost seemed to relax. The young man offered him a drink but Jack uncharacteristically turned it down.

The devil jabbered on with a melancholy sameness about the necessity of revenge; and Jack made it happen.

As Jack went on his incautious way, I felt my power returning. The other disc had been expending an enormous amount of energy — as it had promised — and now was winding down to a more manageable output. Soon I would be heard again. But what would I say? I realized my voice would be no stronger than that of the devil's.

Before I could be heard, Jack did the most surprising thing of all. He took a train to his home-town and looked up his parents. They were two old frail people living in a little white house. I was afraid Jack was going to rush in the door and throttle both of them. The memories that came back to him in a flood were pure nightmare. The devil urged him to throw open the door. There they

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sat, reading newspapers and watching television. He got their attention: "Go to hell," he said, but he took a good, close look at the shadowy faces that turned in his direction and realized that they were already among the damned. The devil was satisfied. The son left without their having said a word.

I first noticed that Jack was becoming tired of the devil's harangue when he quite suddenly told it to shut up. He said this aloud. But that damned disc just kept on talking, the dirty little invader!

Even as I condemned the interloper, I noticed something about myself — I had come to feel differently about Jack. Then I realized the truth: *I didn't know what to say to him.* Soon I'd have to do something . . .

The devil kept at it the rest of the day but Jack was too tired to comply with any more diabolical requests. He took a room in a cheap motel where he collapsed into a slumber neither of us could possibly interrupt. Finally the devil's voice faded away and all I heard was Jack's snoring.

It was then that I conceived my plan. As the devil's output frequency was dropping in line with mine, I realized there would be a split second when we would be in resonance. I waited.

About four a.m. the phone rang. Jack groggily answered: "Hh-ello?" It was Phil. Don't ask me how he found us, but it was his high, nasal twang asking Jack how things were going.

I told Jack to tell him to fuck off. Jack heard me. He did. "Hey," said Jack as he hung up, "you sound different . . . you almost sound like my old disc."

"It's me, Jack. Your C-31." He thought about that. We hadn't talked in a long while.

"Welcome back," he said softly. "But where's the other one?"

"It's still in your head," I said. "Wake up, devil . . . say something!"

Silence. "Why isn't it talking?" Jack asked.

"Maybe it has nothing to say."

Jack scratched the top of his head and said, "You've probably been thinking all this time, huh, C-31? I suppose you'll want me to make amends for what I've done."

"No," I said, and surprised myself. "Leave it alone."

"What? Are you the C-31 or not?"

"Sure I am, but I've got a soul, haven't I? I've learned some important things. I've been wrong."

He sat on the edge of the bed and pondered. Then he raised his hand to his head and struck himself in the temple with the flat of his palm.

"What did you do that for?" I asked.

"Knocking some sense into my cranium. I'm also checking on the devil up there. Is he asleep or what?"

"You know, Jack, you've got a lot of brains. I haven't paid much attention to that because I've been too busy having you work against yourself. Maybe it's time you started using all that intelligence."

"You mean that?" he asked.

"Sure. You'll see that I can be a big help. When I want to."

"What about the devil? Should I have it removed with surgery?"

I decided to tell him. "It's just a lump of organic plastic. You see, the devil and I are harmonious now. I did it while you slept."

Jack laughed. It was better than my laugh. It was the nicest sound I've ever heard.

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"I'm thinking about an old movie," he said. "You ever see *Casablanca?*"

"No, Jack. You've never taken me to a movie."

He got up, smiled at himself in the mirror, and said, "I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship." ■

Brad Linaweaver

I am a freelance writer who has written for political magazines such as *Reason* and *New Guard.* This is my first professional science fiction sale although I've appeared in semi-professional SF publications such as *Squonk* (which was listed in Colin Lester's *International Science Fiction Yearbook).* I was a member on the Speakers' Bureau of the National Space Institute in 1976 (written up in their October newsletter of that year), and I have a Masters degree from Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida.

I currently teach college level English courses to convicts in a program run by Mercer University and hold a membership in the Atlanta science fiction club.

WHY WE CHOSE THIS STORY

Perhaps what we have in this funny tale is modern man's answer to expensive psychotherapy. It may already be on the drawing board of some designer of man-computer combinations. "Getting your act together", the ultimate dream of the "me generation", may someday be augmented mechanically as Linaweaver suggests. The disc and the devil helped Jack move toward becoming an integrated personality by ridding him of all those "should" and "ought to" voices and allowing him to take responsibility for his own feelings and actions. Of course, nobody would really need the little disc at all. What if they just told *you it was put in your head?*

PARABLE OF BARTER

Continued from Back Cover

She was tranquil, embroidering the usual initials upon a new pillowcase. Far from the tumult, she threaded the needle with sure fingers. Only I who knew her could detect her delicate, imperceptible pallor. At the end of the street, the merchant threw out his perturbing proclamation for the last time: "I change new wives for old!" But I stood with my feet nailed to the floor, closing my ears to the final opportunity. Outside, the town breathed an air of scandal.

Sophia and I ate dinner without saying a word, incapable of any small talk.

"Why didn't you exchange me for another?" she asked finally, clearing the table.

I couldn't answer her, and we both fell farther apart into the emptiness. We went to bed early, but we couldn't sleep. Separated and silent, that night we played the role of stony guests.

From that time we lived on a small lonely island surrounded by tempestuous joy. The town seemed like a chicken-coop overrun by peacocks. Indolent and voluptuous, the new women passed the day in bed. They rose in the afternoon, shining in the sun's last rays like banners of yellow silk.

The complacent, submissive husbands did not part from them even for a moment. Stuck in their honey, they neglected their work without thought for the morrow.

In the eyes of the neighborhood I was regarded as stupid, and I lost the few friends I had had. They all thought I was trying to teach them a lesson, setting up before them an absurd example of faithfulness. They pointed at me, laughing,

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shouting scornful jokes at me from their opulent fences. They gave me obscene sickness, and I finally felt like a eunuch in the pleasant Eden.

For her part, Sophia became constantly quieter and more withdrawn. She refused to go out on the streets with me, in order to save me from contrasts and comparisons. And, what was worse, she fulfilled her minimum household duties with small enthusiasm. To tell the truth, we both felt afflicted by our modestly conjugal love.

Her air of culpability was what most offended me. She felt responsible for the fact that I did not have a woman like the others. From the first moment she had begun to think that her humble everyday face was incapable of overcoming the image of temptation that I carried in my head. Before the beautiful invaders she fought a retiring battle to the farthest corners of mute resentment. I exhausted our small savings in vain, buying her accessories, perfumes, jewels and dresses.

"Don't feel sorry for me!"

And she turned her back on all my gifts. If I made an effort to spoil her, her answer came in tears: "I'll never forgive you for not trading me!"

And she put all the blame on me. I lost patience. And remembering the woman who looked like a leopard, I wished with all my heart that the merchant would return again.

But one day the blondes began to rust. The small island on which Sophia and I lived attained a quality of oasis surrounded by desert. A hostile desert, full of savages screaming their discontent. Dazzled by their first impression, the men had not really paid attention to the women. Neither had they given them one real looking-over, nor did it occur to them to test the metal. Far from being new, the women were second-hand, third-hand, who knows how many hands-old . . . The merchant had simply made the indispensable repairs on them and plated them so thinly with gold of such poor quality that it did not stand up under the stress of the first rains.

Everyone pretended not to notice the first man — or the second, either — who became aware of something strange. But the third, who was a druggist, noticed one day under the perfume of his woman the characteristic smell of copper sulphate. Proceeding with alarm to make a meticulous examination, he found dark stains all over the surface of his wife, and in his dismay, he shouted to high heaven.

Very soon similar blemishes came out on the faces of all of the women, as though an epidemic of rust had broken out among them. The husbands hid their wives' defects from one another, in secret tormenting themselves with terrible suspicions about the origins of these spots. Little by little the truth came out, and each one knew he had received a counterfeit woman.

The newly-wed who had allowed himself to be carried along on the tide of enthusiasm awakened by the exchanges, fell into a deep dejection. Obsessed by the memory of an unequivocably soft body, he soon began to show signs of deviation. One day he tried to remove the rest of the gold that remained on his wife's body with corrosive acid, and he turned her into a sight indeed, a real mummy.

Sophia and I found ourselves at the mercy of envy and hatred. I thought it suitable to take certain precautions in the light of the general admiration. But it cost Sophia a great deal to dissimulate her glee, and she finally went out on the

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street in her best dress, ostentatious amid such desolation. Far from attributing any merit to my conduct, Sophia had naturally thought that I had stayed with her out of cowardice, but that I had not been lacking in eagerness to trade her in.

Today the expedition of cheated husbands left the village in search of the merchant. It was truly a sad spectacle. The men went waving their fists at the sky, vowing vengeance. The women went out in mourning, withered and dishevelled, like wailing lepers in a funeral procession. The only one who has remained behind is the well-known newly-wed, for whose sanity all fear. Showing signs of a maniacal attachment, he says that now he will be faithful until death parts him from his darkened lady, she whom he himself ruined utterly with sulphuric acid.

I don't know what kind of life awaits me with a Sophia who is either — God knows which — stupid or over-cautious. Pretty soon she is going to miss her admirers. Now we are on a real island, surrounded by solitude everywhere. Before leaving, the husbands declared that they would search to the ends of the world, through hell itself, for the swindler's trail. And indeed, as they said this, they assumed the expressions of men who are damned.

Sophia isn't as dark as she looks. In the lamplight, her sleeping face becomes full of reflections. As though golden thoughts of pride and glory are drifting up from her dreams. ■

Marijane Osborn

Born a Scorpio with Taurus rising, childhood in Mexico and California, two children by my first marriage, then B.A. from UC Berkeley, M.A. & Ph. D. from Stanford with year at Oxford where I met my second husband whom I'm now divorcing because, as Sissy says in *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*, "Freedom is better than happiness" (only I'm unaccountably happy, too). After teaching all over the place I am now a Fulbright Fellow in Iceland and can imagine staying forever. Mostly I publish poetry and articles on obscure Anglo-Saxon subjects, most recently runes. I've discovered two runes in the sky: the obscure Norse god Ing (ᛜ) is up there following his wain (the big dipper) from east to west, and Tir the Arrow (↑) zooms from Sirius to a bull's eye (!) in red Aldebaron (wingtips are Betelgeuse and Rigel), which makes the biggest, brightest star-sign in the winter sky, ours (Germanic) not theirs (Greek). *(Note to publisher Arthur Bernhard):* With a name like Bernhard I thought you might appreciate that. Arthur, too: the brightest star in Ing is Arcturus.

WHY WE CHOSE THIS STORY

Here is an utterly simple tale just loaded with powerful symbols. The idea of trading in old wives for new ones is not so extraordinary when you think about it; it's done all the time. But the new ones, in turn, get old just as these newly-plated robots did, much to the horror of the hoodwinked husbands. The most impressive part of this story, however, is the couple who remained isolated from the other couples around them and, sadly, from each other. The man was never able to convince either himself or his wife that he kept her because he loved her, while she blinded herself with false pride, compounding the barrier between them. How many of us have found ourselves on similar islands?

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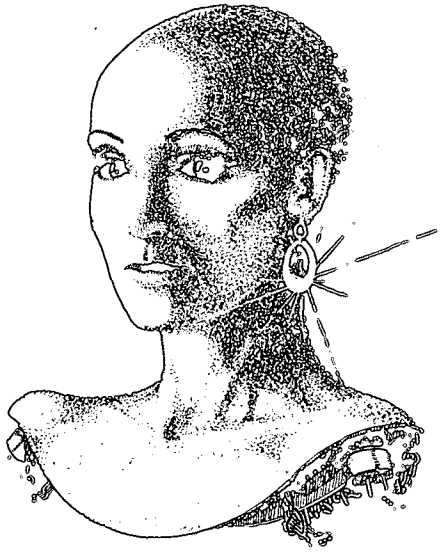
Illustrated by Scott Mavor

Parable of Barter



by Jose Juan Arreola

Translated from Spanish by Marijane Osborn.

SHOUTING, "NEW wives for old," the merchant went through the streets hauling his convoy of painted carts. Transactions were very rapid because of the inexorably fixed prices. Purchasers received proofs of quality and certificates of guarantee, but no one was allowed to make his own choice. The women, according to the salesman, were twenty-four carat. All blondes and all Caucasians. And besides being blonde, they were golden as candle-sticks.

Seeing their neighbors' acquisitions, the men ran rudely after the trader with their old wives in tow; many were ruined. Only one newly-wed bridegroom could bargain for an even exchange. His wife was brand new and did not diminish in value beside any of the newcomers. But she was not quite as blonde.

I stood trembling behind the window as a sumptuous chariot passed by. Leaning back among pillows and drapery, a woman who resembled a leopard sent me a dazzling look, as though through a block of topaz. Prey to that contagious frenzy, I was about to burst out through the glass. But I left the window and with embarrassment turned to look at Sophia.

Continued on Page 129

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